

PRETTY SINISTER

FRANCIS BEEDING

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By Francis Beeding

THE SEVEN SLEEPERS

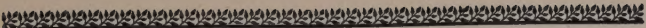
THE LITTLE WHITE HAG

THE HIDDEN KINGDOM

THE HOUSE OF DR. EDWARDES

THE SIX PROUD WALKERS

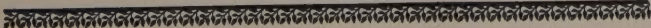
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By
FRANCIS BEEDING

TORONTO
McCLELLAND AND STEWART
1929



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Published February, 1929

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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PRETTY SINISTER

CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE OF ILLUSION

Mr. Donald Sterling was aggrieved. The road was bad. The car was worse. And worst of all was the weather.

But it was no use losing one's temper. In the good old days before the war in Russia, when things had gone wrong, there had always been some one who could be made to suffer for it. But he was in England now, and the only way in which it ever seemed possible to relieve one's feelings in England was to swear.

He swore carefully and with a neat, clipped accent; in English, of course, for now he was an Englishman. He must not forget that—a British subject of King George, and a very useful thing to be, as he had found on more than one occasion since his naturalization six years ago in 1922. But it was difficult. He could talk like an Englishman, ride and shoot better than most. But blood was thicker than water, and he would never really be one of them.

Not that he regretted his decision. What else could he have done? There was little use in being Count Dmitri Soubiroff, of the Russian Imperial Guard, when there was no guard and no emperor,

and no Russia, as he conceived it, left. So he had pulled strings and become Mr. Donald Sterling, an Englishman.

The aged Morris bumped and bucketed over the long road. The country was getting wilder every minute and the light less. Had he perhaps lost his way? There was no remedy, if he had. He was alone in a land without a habitation; and the world must have looked like this when Noah felt it was time to be closing the ark.

He was tired and that was scarcely to be wondered at. From Bergen to Hull in half a gale was no joke for so devoted a landsman. His brain was still reeling like interminable gray seas. And then, on the top of it, had come this tiresome motor drive, quite unexpected and very disagreeable. He had meant to take the train in an ordinary civilized manner, but at Hull a telegram, from Doctor Shorthouse of course, had been handed to him as he staggered across the gangway, still queasy and shaken. It had named a garage and had told him to pick up the car and bring it over the moors to Sham Castle. So, after a hasty meal and a couple of stiff brandies, without too much soda, he had got the car and started. He had felt rebellious, but thought it wiser to obey. It had not, in fact occurred to him to do otherwise; the doctor was usually obeyed. Even Jenkins had discovered that.

Dmitri's lips twisted at the thought of Jenkins. Where on earth had the doctor picked him up? A little London cockney, with a bad record, and not

even a very stout heart. Well, that was the doctor's affair, he supposed. At the moment it was his job to push the car along for all it was worth, and reach his destination before nightfall.

He might miss the place altogether in the dark, for he had nothing to go upon except the doctor's description. Heaven send that the place was really habitable and that the doctor had got hold of some decent servants and laid in some tolerable food and wine. But comfort was probably the last thing Shorthouse was ever likely to worry about. That man was scarcely human in some ways. Anyhow, he would be seeing them all again pretty soon, Shorthouse and Jenkins and Goldenberg, who must have arrived there with Irma Brezhoff at least two days ago.

Irma Brezhoff—that started a new train of thought. Very handsome she had looked in her boy's clothes—not much life or spirit in her for the moment, of course, but the doctor would see to that. The doctor had doubtless got to work already, and she would soon be well again. It had gone against the hair of his disposition to leave her with Goldenberg at Geneva, but he could scarcely have avoided that.

The rain was still streaming down. It had been hot all day, and in the late afternoon the storm had burst in great thunder over the moors. At one moment so deadly had it been that Dmitri had been forced to stop altogether and run the car into a little spinney of twisted fir trees, naked and broken by their struggle with the Pole-begotten winds of the

North. Then the thunder and lashing rain had given place to a steady vertical downpour, and he had pushed on again.

He was now on a high stretch of country with a great dale lying to the right. The heather was still dark. The moors, as he saw them through the rain, looked like couchant beasts with paws folded beneath them in the valley. It was a desolate land where nothing grew. He had not seen a soul for the last ten miles—except for a gamekeeper caught by the storm and crouching behind a grouse butt. His mind went back instinctively to the great plains, where the house of his father had stood, and the winding Volga—the endless wheat and the patient peasants, stupid as their oxen. The land, it was true, was frozen in the winter and often they had been snowbound for weeks together. But in the great castle it had been warm enough, and there had been plenty of servants and drink, and those Polish dancers that he and his brother had got from Warsaw. They had cost a mint of money, especially the dark one with the little mole above her right breast. But they had been worth it, well worth it. . . . Ah, the good old days.

It was getting darker and the rain was abating. Time it did. The side curtains were badly torn and the whole of his right elbow and sleeve were soaked.

But there at last was the house, the first he had seen since he had left Kirbymoorside some seven miles or so behind him.

Dmitri strained his eyes through the blurred wind screen and at the same moment a watery gleam of

sunshine was spilled from the edge of an angry cloud. Yes, that was the house all right, and now he had barely half a mile to go. Clever of him to find it so easily, for he had known only its general position and its name.

So that was Sham Castle. The man who built it must have been mad, he thought, as he jammed on the accelerator and hustled the car down the last three or four hundred yards of open road.

Seen from a distance it looked like a Victorian illustration of the Morte d'Arthur, or the Seven Champions of Christendom. It had one large and several small turrets, rising from a castellated roof, and there were outbuildings which bore a faint resemblance to the outer bailey, or barbican of a mediæval fortress. When you were near it, however, the resemblance ceased, or rather took on a new form. The entrance was by way of a ridiculous portico, with small crenellated knobs upon it—you could not properly call them machicolations. The whole thing was only a brick thick. A short drive led from the portico to a Gothic doorway, meant to be imposing, but looking only silly, with lancet windows on either side and a modern drainpipe running down the wall, gurgling at the moment like a drinker trying to satisfy an unquenchable thirst.

Dmitri swung the car to the left under the portico and pulled it up with a jerk before the Gothic door. He climbed stiffly from the seat, dragging his suit case after him. Then he stood for a moment, looking round.

There was a narrow open window in the wall above his head, and just as he was about to pull the bell his eye was caught by a flutter of white. Glancing up, he saw a head thrust out, and a pair of glittering eyes surveyed him. They belonged to an old woman with gray hair and a mouth set in a grim line. On her head was a soiled cap which had once been white. Her mouth tightened further as she stared at him, and her expression was menacing.

"One of the servants," thought Dmitri. "I hope it isn't the cook."

The door in front of him creaked and swung open, and Dmitri sighed with relief as he saw the tall, thin form of Doctor Shorthouse.

The doctor made an incongruous figure, standing in front of that ridiculous portico, miles from anywhere, with the unfriendly moor all about him. He was dressed as for a London consultation—in a short black coat with a butterfly collar and black tie with a pin in it containing a single rose diamond, striped trousers and patent leather boots.

Dmitri, however, did not smile. One did not smile at the doctor. He might be incongruous but he was anything but absurd. Your attention was at once diverted from the formal clothes to the lean face, with its tall forehead, jutting well over the dark eyes, and the flexible, thin mouth, with its suggestion of intelligence and power.

"At last," said the doctor abruptly. "I was beginning to wonder when we should see you again."

He spoke with a curious, cold indifference which

was the more unpleasant as Dmitri felt that he had intended to say not *when* but *if* we should see you again. The tone would in any case have been the same. A cold fish, the doctor. If you were suddenly to drop dead on the carpet, he would ring the bell and ask to have you removed.

Dmitri glanced at him resentfully, as between them they lifted his suit case, which was of heavy leather, across the threshold.

"I know I'm late, Doctor," he replied, "but I was determined not to take any risks. You wouldn't have been too pleased to see me if I'd turned up a day sooner with Stolin at my heels."

They were standing now in the main hall, and the doctor had closed the door. The hall was large and shadowy.

"Good God," said Dmitri suddenly. "What is that?"

Down the corridor to the left, which branched off from the main hall they had now entered, came a sudden crash, and Dmitri clutched the doctor nervously by the arm. From the direction of the crash he could hear the voice of a woman uplifted in ex-postulation.

"Get out of my kitchen," it said. "I've said I won't 'ave it, and I won't. You nasty 'ulking black man. Get out of it, I say."

There was another crash, followed by a splintering of broken crockery. Then a door opened somewhere down the corridor, and a moment later the figure of an old woman appeared.

Dmitri recognized her at once. It was the woman who had stared at him from the window a short time before. She was dressed in the traditional black of the working housekeeper, and her hands were folded primly in front of her.

"I'm sorry, Doctor," she said, "but I've 'ad a misfortune."

Doctor Shorthouse looked at her reprovingly.

"That's the second time to-day," he said. "What's the matter with you, Mrs. Murdoch?"

"Don't you go suggestin' that there's anything the matter with me, Doctor. It's that nasty black man again. Comes into my kitchen, 'e does. And I won't be 'aunted by an 'eathen savage, though my late 'usband did die in foreign parts. And if it's the blue china sauceboat you're thinking of, I'll match it myself next time I go to York, and pay for it too, out of my wages, which is due next Saturday."

Dmitri looked in astonishment at the doctor. The latter did not seem at all surprised by this oration, but heard the old woman quietly to an end. Then he indicated Dmitri.

"Mrs. Murdoch," he said, "this is Count Dmitri Soubiroff. He will be staying here for some time, and you will do your best to make him comfortable."

Mrs. Murdoch turned to Dmitri and, with her features softening to an expression of respect, gave him a little old-fashioned curtsey.

"Pleased to do anything I can for the Count, to be sure," she said. "And I think I may say that I

know how to treat a gentleman born, having seen service with the nobility and landed gentry. But it's not easy to keep everything as it should be in this house. Something has to go. If it's not the rooms it's the cooking, and if it's not the cooking . . ."

"That's all right, Mrs. Murdoch," said the doctor, interrupting her with a grim smile, "but please don't let it be the cooking. We should like to have supper, if you can manage it, in half an hour."

"Very well, Doctor."

"And no more misfortunes, please. Not this evening, at any rate."

Mrs. Murdoch drew herself up.

"That, Doctor, is not for me to say. They comes by providence. And if I did give the Count a nasty look when he came to the door he will quite understand that there's no ill-feeling. I'm not partial to strangers, unless I knows exactly who they are."

She smiled a little vacantly upon the two men and then quite suddenly withdrew.

Dmitri moved to the empty hearth. He was shivering slightly.

"That's a nice cheerful sort of body servant," he said. "Where on earth did you pick her up?"

Doctor Shorthouse walked to a table in the corner of the hall, poured out a whisky and soda and handed it to Dmitri.

"Drink this," he said. "You can't afford to take cold."

"Not if I'm going to be nursed by Mrs. Murdoch," responded Dmitri, as he drained the whisky.

"You needn't worry about her," said the doctor. "She's been with me for over thirty years and she will suit us very well, as it happens. She doesn't like strangers for one thing, as she told you herself."

"But who's this black man who won't keep out of the kitchen? Is he going to do my valeting?"

"There isn't a black man," said the doctor.

"What do you mean?"

"The black man, I am glad to say, is a pure delusion. The poor old woman has had it for some time—ever since her husband was killed by the Rehoboths in Southwest Africa. And now sit down a moment, and tell me why you're late."

"Didn't Goldenberg explain?"

"You thought you were being followed?"

"I'm pretty sure we were followed from Warsaw."

"Stolin, I suppose?"

"He was certainly one of them. At Breslau I thought we had thrown him off the scent, but I couldn't be certain of it, and I was determined not to take any risks. From Breslau we went to Geneva, and there I was worried again. We put up at a hotel near the station, and of course we kept Irma in her room the whole time. On the evening of my arrival I went out to get some exercise, and, when I got back, I had a look through the papers in my despatch case, and I got rather a nasty shock. I found that they were in the wrong order. I knew exactly how I had left them and I could swear that somebody had been through them in my absence."

"Was the case locked?"

"Of course."

"What were the papers?"

"Only my passport and a few of your letters—nothing vital. But, as I said, they were in the wrong order. Goldenberg, who had remained with the girl swore he hadn't touched them. So I thought it was just possible that some one was still trailing me, and I decided to give him a good run for his money. I told Goldenberg to slip off with Irma direct via Paris to London, while I departed openly by the early morning train to Bale. From Bale I went to Berlin, from Berlin to Sasnitz; from Sasnitz I crossed to Tralborg in Sweden, and from Tralborg to Oslo. And not a sleeper to be had for love or money all the way. From Oslo I went to Bergen and then by boat to Hull—the North Sea, if you please, and your English summer at its worst. All I can say is that if Stolin is still on my tracks he has a better stomach than I have, and I hope he's feeling as bad."

The doctor looked at his friend without emotion.

"Well, my dear Count," he said, "here you are, at all events."

"Thank God for that," said Dmitri, and leaning back, he lighted a cigarette and gazed thoughtfully around the room.

It was a curious place—a high stone hall, paneled for two thirds of its height. The paneling was of pine wood, and above, on the rough stonework, were hung numerous stags' heads and antlers, but they looked, somehow, as though they had never adorned

any living animal. A broad staircase, also of pine wood, occupied the whole of one side of the hall, and led to a gallery which ran at right angles along the whole length of the wall at the back. Beneath the gallery in this wall was a huge Gothic window, reaching to the ground, and furnished incongruously enough with French windows and sun blinds. The interior of Sham Castle was such as might have been expected from what he had seen of the battlements—a Victorian parody of mediæval romance such as might have been conceived and executed by a constant reader of the novels of G. P. R. James.

Dmitri smiled. The whisky was beginning to work, and a grateful warmth spread through his tired limbs.

"I don't think much of your ancestral home, Doctor," he said, after a pause.

"I don't defend it," said the doctor dryly. "But it will serve its turn. I bought it for a song ten years ago. I had no idea that I should ever find it so convenient."

Dmitri helped himself to another whisky and soda.

"Well, Doctor," he said. "It's your turn now. What have you done with Irma?"

"Irma is upstairs in her room."

"Is she . . . well?"

"As well as can be expected. But I don't advise you to see her yet. Her condition is . . . peculiar, and it may be some time before I can achieve any result."

"She didn't give us any trouble on the way. She came away from Warsaw like a lamb."

"Very possibly," said the doctor dryly. "But the next step will be rather more . . . complicated, and you must leave that entirely to me."

"Very well, Doctor. But what is it to be for the moment—boy or girl?"

"Miss Irma Brezhoff, if you don't mind. I've removed her boy's clothes. They were quite useful during the journey, but they would be fatal now. Mrs. Murdoch bought her some things in Kirbymoorside, not very fashionable, I'm afraid, but she won't mind that very much for some time."

Dmitri rose and surveyed himself in the mirror over the hearth.

"Don't you think I might see her, Doctor? One never knows. It might help things on a bit."

Doctor Shorthouse looked unresponsively at his friend.

"You flatter yourself, Dmitri," he said. "I must ask you, if you don't mind, to refrain from trying the effect of your fascinations on Irma Brezhoff. Later on, perhaps . . ."

"Very well, Doctor. I shall be ready when you are. Meanwhile, what's become of little Albert and the trusty squire? Why aren't they here to welcome me? It was the least they could do."

"Goldenberg left two days ago for London. I sent him via Hull, and he left the car there for you. Jenkins went off to London this afternoon to join

him—as soon as we got your wireless from the boat, telling us to expect you this evening.”

Dmitri looked resentfully at the doctor. He had expected a word of commendation. He hadn't done so badly, come to think of it.

“Well, Doctor,” he said at last, “aren't you going to congratulate me?”

“Time for that,” replied the doctor smoothly, “when the work is done. It's early yet to begin admiring ourselves. We can do that later, for the rest of our lives, in fact, if we succeed.”

“Well, I've done my share,” said Dmitri. “Have you considered what would have happened if they'd caught me in Warsaw?”

“It hardly required much consideration, my dear Count.”

Doctor Shorthouse smiled and put a friendly hand on Dmitri's shoulder.

“You may take it from me, Dmitri, I'm very glad, and I may say, not a little surprised, to see you.”

“Well, Doctor, it's up to you now—you and Jenkins.”

“It is, as you say, up to me and Jenkins,” replied the doctor. “And perhaps I ought to tell you, though it's not of much importance, that Jenkins is worried.”

“He always is,” said Dmitri peevishly. “I can't think why you let him into this show at all. He hasn't the pluck or the brains of a rabbit.”

“Jenkins, for the moment, is necessary. Irma's

papers are vital, and only Jenkins can get them. We're only amateurs, and this is work for a professional. However, I've sent Goldenberg with him to London, and Goldenberg will keep an eye on him and see that he doesn't panic. For Jenkins, as I said, is worried, distinctly worried."

The doctor paused and took a turn up the room and back again.

"Ever heard of a man called Rupert Ahrens?" he asked.

"I have not."

"I thought perhaps you might. It seems he's a Russian."

"There are still quite a lot of Russians," said Dmitri.

The doctor moved across the room and began to play with a brass candlestick on the mantelpiece by the empty hearth.

"Anyhow," he continued, "that's the man who is worrying Jenkins. It seems that Ahrens has left Russia and that Jenkins is extremely anxious not to meet him again. Jenkins is not very coherent on the subject, but I infer that they had dealings with each other in the past. I also gather that the frequent allusions of Jenkins to his old acquaintance as Red Rupert have special reference to the color of his beard. So if you do happen to see a gentleman with red hair you will draw your own conclusions."

Dmitri fidgeted in his chair. What had all this got to do with Irma and her papers and the work for which he had risked his distinguished life in the

wilds of Poland? Why couldn't Jenkins keep his mind on the business in hand?

"The papers, Doctor," he said impatiently. "Are you quite sure they're in London still?"

"Quite sure," said the doctor smoothly. "I doubt if they have ever left the country. Irma's father was a wise man. Unlike some of your Russian aristocratic friends, he had no very strong belief in the Czarist régime and he invested every penny of his money outside Russia, and deposited all his family papers in England. We know where they are, and now, as you say, it's up to Jenkins. I don't think we have any cause to be anxious. Fortunately for us, Jenkins is quite at the top of his profession."

There was a sound of hurried footsteps in the corridor. The door leading to it was burst open, and Mrs. Murdoch appeared on the threshold.

"Doctor," she began at once. "I beg pardon for coming on you like this, but anybody else in my place would feel the same. There's things I can stand, but when it comes to faces . . ."

"Faces!" said the doctor sharply. "What do you mean?"

"A nasty 'uman face," said Mrs. Murdoch, "pressed against the winder pane. I was just 'eating up the soup, when it 'appened."

"Then continue to heat up the soup, please, unless that black man of yours has made away with it."

"It isn't the black man, Doctor. I'm used to having 'im about the place—almost 'omely, as you might

say. But this was different. As white as a sheet 'e was, and if you don't believe me, I can show you his marks on the winder."

"All right, Mrs. Murdoch," said the doctor. "I'll come and see for myself."

Mrs. Murdoch turned and went doubtfully back to the corridor from which she had emerged.

The doctor looked at Dmitri, who, much disturbed by the sudden appearance of Mrs. Murdoch and her strange intelligence, was pouring himself out a third whisky and soda with a hand that shook.

"This may be genuine," said the doctor. "I'll go and see if there are any traces of a visitor. You seem quite upset, Dmitri."

"Of course I'm upset. Haven't I been running about Europe for the last three days just to avoid this sort of thing? It may be Stolin, for all we know."

"It may, as you say, be Stolin."

"That would be awkward. I don't want to meet *him* again."

"It would be awkward," the doctor agreed, "and if you ever should meet him again, I advise you, for your own sake, to remember . . ."

The doctor paused, a tall, thin shadow in the failing light.

"Well," Dmitri asked, "what is it that I am to remember?"

"Stolin is not immortal," said the doctor.

CHAPTER II

THE GREAT PASSAGE

Colonel Alistair Granby, D.S.O. of the Intelligence, was seated at the open window of the Bar Cintra, situated in one of the *rues basses* of the city of Geneva. Immediately opposite him was a swing door, giving access to the street. To his left ran a long low room. The tables were imitation barrels and the walls were lined with great wooden casks with cordial inscriptions, Amontillado, Salero, Porto Vieux and the like, that spoke of the warm South, the serried vines stretching to the sun-drenched plains and the swarthy dwellers in Iberia. Before him was a glass of the golden sherry for which the bar is justly famed.

He appeared to be reading one of the local newspapers, but now and then he would glance quickly through the open window into the street, where the passers-by moved in and out of his vision, scarcely a yard away. Any one who had stood directly behind him could have seen that he was reading not the newspaper in his left hand, but a letter held in front of the printed sheet. But, then, no one could have stood behind him, for his chair was against the wall.

That was a habit of his—to sit with his back to the wall, and it was a habit with a history.

He frowned slightly as he read the letter, but his eyes were smiling. It was written in bad French on cheap notepaper, and for his own amusement he translated it quite literally from the foreign tongue.

And this was what he read:

210 RUE DU RHONE.

To Monsieur: the Chief of the Intelligence.

I have the advantage to bring you information for all useful ends, which I hope may be beneficial, as is my habit.

Yesterday evening I saw enter my tobacco arcade Monsieur Stolin. Monsieur Stolin perceived that I was alone, since my wife was out and my shop boy on an errand. He therefore charged me to say that he was gravely preoccupied with what might have happened to a young lady, but when he was going to tell me the name (of the young lady) and the reason for which he preoccupied himself with her, behold another gentleman entered my shop who was large, and he had a moustache, with some gray hairs in it and spectacles of a somber tint, and a scar on his left cheek and fingers long and flat, with one that lacked—the little one on the left. Monsieur Stolin looked at this gentleman with discretion and then he leaned himself over the glass case of cigarettes and with an Eversharp pencil during that moment he rapidly inscribed on a beautiful packet of Three Castles American Cigarettes of the value of 4.70 francs, a design, and then some signs, and he indicated the packet, and I threw over it a copy of the *Tribune de Genève* (this is a newspaper of Geneva). Then Monsieur

Stolin left and, as the second gentleman approached himself, I placed the packet in a drawer, and I guard it for you. Monsieur Stolin did not change his face when the other gentleman came into the shop, but I could perceive that within himself he was overturned.

Then the second gentleman asked me for a box of tobacco with a Jewish accent, and he left very quickly, going the same route as Monsieur Stolin.

I have the advantage of confirming that the design is very difficult to understand, but that your service will comprehend it, and I hold at your disposition the packet of Three Castles, of which the value is 4.70 francs, plus the cost of despatch, in regard to which I hope you will earnestly wish to recognize my devotion. Rendering to yourself an account of the derangement and cost of despatch and the risk of the message, which is very important, you will understand that this packet has a minimum value of £25. sterling. Waiting for which sum I have the honor, Monsieur the Chief of the Intelligence, to present to you my warm salutations, and an assurance of my perpetual devotion,
Jean Dubois.

Granby thrust the letter back into his pocket. The tobacco merchant was a stupid little man but moderately honest and his store had been used for years by the Service as a pillar box.

Granby then glanced at his watch. There was no hurry. It was only just after five o'clock; the sherry was excellent, and he needed it. He would need a great deal of it if he stayed very long in Geneva, which heaven forbid.

Three days ago he had been preparing to join a

yachting party. Not that he cared for yachts, but young Carrol had insisted, and anyway, he had felt that he fully deserved a rest. And now here he was, quite unexpectedly, in the city of Calvin—all because his Chief, rightly or wrongly, attached importance to that preposterous letter and the queer behavior of Stolin.

The Foreign Office, it seemed, was worried; it had informed his Chief that it was worried, three times in as many days. And his Chief had somehow got the idea into his head that what worried the Foreign Office might possibly have some distant or close connection with the letter that had come to London from the tobacconist in Geneva.

Three men had recently left Russia. Granby had all three of them very clearly in his mind. They were a dangerous trio, and the Foreign Office, on principle, had reason to be worried. Granby's thoughts went to his dealings with these men in the past—very remote it all seemed to him now, sitting quietly in Geneva. Time had passed. It was a way time had. He was twelve years older now—but, he hoped, not a moment wiser—than when he had first met Rupert Ahrens. That had been in Munich where, as an Englishman in 1916, Granby had not been feeling quite at home. And Red Rupert—as he was called—had been working for the other side, and there had been a moment when, if Rupert had talked less and got down sooner to business, he might have cut his (Granby's) throat. Or rather Soly Levinson would have done that—the little man

with the hooked nose and the curly ears, while Red Rupert, as was his way, looked on and laughed. Rupert was like that. Jean Dupin, last of the three Graces, had been holding Granby's legs a nasty moment, and he had been very glad that there happened to be friends passing at the time. Otherwise, he wouldn't be looking for Red Rupert now.

The Service had always had a weak spot for Ahrens and his friends, and it had given them pet names. Pip, Squeak and Wilfrid they were called, and the Chief of the Intelligence was always glad to know exactly where they were and what they were doing. For the last five years they had been in the service of Soviet Russia and had, it was understood, made themselves useful to Trotsky. And now Trotsky had been deposed and was said to be hunting bears in Russian Turkestan. He had lost the political game, but the man who had organized the Red Armies was still a man to be watched. His satellites might have left Russia merely to look for work with another master, but, on the other hand, they might have other ends in view. So Stolin had been instructed to keep an eye on them, and his last message to London had been to the effect that he had seen Squeak and Wilfrid, which was plain English for Soly Levinson and Jean Dupin, in Warsaw. First and Second Murderers waiting for Macbeth, had been Granby's comment. But that was ten days ago. Since then not a word had come from Stolin and the only possible clue to his whereabouts was this letter from the tobacconist. It showed one

thing, at any rate. Stolin had evidently moved on to Geneva. So presumably had Pip, Squeak and Wilfrid.

That was like Stolin—a queer, solitary, independent fellow—who had always preferred to play a lone hand. But the Foreign Office, being worried, was not disposed to wait. Information must be obtained, and quickly too.

So Granby had left for Geneva, traveling as Colonel Rogers, of the British delegation. For by a fortunate coincidence his journey chimed with that of the Foreign Secretary, who with his staff was going to Geneva to attend a meeting of the Council of the League of Nations. Granby had traveled as one of the staff, and had even been invited to a short conference with the Foreign Secretary himself. The Foreign Secretary was anxious—distinctly anxious. He had urged Granby to be careful. Ahrens, he had said, was a dangerous fellow. The warning was kind but hardly necessary.

Granby took another sip of the golden wine and pulled out the letter again: "*He charged me to say that he was gravely preoccupied with what might have happened to a young lady.*" That was bad. He was surprised at Stolin. It didn't do to be gravely preoccupied with a young lady when you were being paid to be gravely preoccupied with Pip, Squeak and Wilfrid. He would have to speak seriously to Stolin. The Service was a hard master. "Cut it out, old man, cut it out." That was what he would say to Stolin.

His eyes were caught by a pair of slim legs moving slowly past the window. They were sheathed in silk stockings and the hem of the short skirt barely reached the knees. The rest of the figure was as attractive as the legs; and the girl looked like a dove among the ravens. She glanced at Granby as she sauntered past the open window, and he half rose as he caught sight of the pretty painted face.

Then he sat down abruptly and picked up his paper. The girl, after hesitating a second, moved on with a shrug of her slim shoulders.

"Cut it out, old man, cut it out," said Granby, to himself this time, and for five minutes he compelled himself to read about a crisis in Poland.

"That's better," he said at last, "temperature quite normal, and not a charmer in sight."

He beckoned to the waiter, and draining his glass of sherry paid and passed to the door.

It was then that he took a sudden dislike to the Bar Cintra. "I've never felt quite the same towards it since," he would say in years to come. For the door, as he approached it, was suddenly pushed open from the outside and a small dark-haired man entered. He had a hook nose and curly ears, and was dressed in the mistaken fashion that only a Continental tailor can achieve. The two men collided in the doorway and for a moment their eyes met. "Par-don," muttered Granby as he passed into the street, but to himself he was saying something less orthodox. For he had recognized the man at once, though the last time he had seen him had been twelve years

ago in a Munich *keller*, and the man had then worn a beard and a moustache. That, in a word, was Soly Levinson—in plain English, Squeak—and where there was Squeak, there were usually Pip and Wilfrid.

He walked slowly down the street, passing on his left a hawker who was trying to sell some patent stuff for removing stains, even the most endurable. Granby was thinking swiftly what he should do. He had been sent to look for these three men and here at least was one of them. Probably Stolin himself was not far off, unless he was still gravely preoccupied with what might have happened to a young lady.

What was the next move? Should he go back and shadow the little Jew, or should he go on to the tobacconist and get the mysterious message?

He paused and, to cover his uncertainty, pulled out his cigarette case, extracted and lit a cigarette.

As he did so he became aware of a small crowd round the itinerant vender of the patent stain-remover. Unobtrusively he joined it, noticing as he did so that the vender had taken up his stand at the corner of a small square and that the bar which he had just left, which was at the angle of the square, had a second door, directly facing him as he stood among the people who surrounded the vender.

This door now opened suddenly and Soly Levinson came quickly out.

Granby turned abruptly and made off down the street. Had Levinson recognized him in the bar?

That was the question. Was Levinson on his guard and even now trailing his man? That could only be discovered by experiment.

Granby strolled down the street, swinging his stick, every inch a tourist in his gray suit and soft hat. But the blue eyes in the thin face were hard and bright.

The Rue de la Confederation down which he walked was the main shopping center of Geneva. He passed by an imposing chemist's shop, announcing itself as the principal pharmacy, and then by a cinema, outside which was a model of Charlie Chaplin riding a bicycle. He stopped deliberately opposite the model and stood looking at it, as an idle tourist would.

Presently he moved on again, and soon he was almost sure that Soly was aware of him. The pavement was thronged with cumbersome Genevese intent on their evening shopping. But Granby's eyes were not on the crowd immediately round him. He was looking aside, across the street, and sure enough, there was his man. Soly had crossed the road and was sauntering apparently just as idly as Granby on the other side. He was nearly parallel to him, and seemingly engaged in mastering a large cigar, but Granby was not deceived. He even mentally congratulated Soly. Soly knew a thing or two about shadowing—had probably spent most of his life at it.

Granby was passing now a large store, the biggest in Geneva. It was called *Au Grand Passage*, and apparently it sold you everything. Standing in front

of a swing door by the side of a big plate-glass window was a chasseur. Granby sauntered up to him.

"So this," he said, "is the Great Passage?"

"It is," said the chasseur.

"Why?" asked Granby.

"It seems to me," said the chasseur, "that it calls itself a passage because that precisely is its nature."

"I see," said Granby. "And what is the nature of a passage?"

"It is the nature of a passage," the chasseur gravely responded, "to lead from one place to another. This shop has two great entrances—the one before which you see me stationed, and another in the Rue du Rhône which corresponds."

"Thank you, Alphonse," said Granby.

He looked for Soly out of the corner of his eye. There he was, still on the other side of the road. He had stopped when Granby had stopped, and was now apparently engaged in wrapt contemplation of a display of women's stockings in a shop window.

Granby waited his opportunity, which was not long in coming. A tram clattered past, its bell clanging noisily. The moment it was well abreast of him Granby pushed through the swing doors and entered the shop.

"And now," he said with a chuckle, "for the great entrance which corresponds."

Progress, however, was difficult, for he found himself at once meeting a large crowd of buyers. Some

sort of sale was proceeding, and a number of heated women were seeking to acquire quantities of highly colored stuffs called "coupons."

"Remnants, they are," said Granby to himself. "Shades of Peter Robinson."

Successfully avoiding an officious shopwalker, whose splendid appearance was somewhat marred by the lack of two buttons on his waistcoat, he began to thread his way through the crowd of buyers across the shop. It was a slow business. There was not, as he had hoped, a broad passage running down the center, but only a series of narrow paths between piled-up counters, and the customers were large and slow to move.

"Under-engined for their tonnage," said Granby.

He pushed his way along with many muttered apologies. Had he thrown off his faithful follower or had his maneuver been perceived? The question was not long unanswered, for when he had reached the center of the shop there again was Soly, a little to his left and just behind him, very red in the face, minus his cigar and breathing hard, and in his wake a number of angry persons who might be regarded as the casualties of his advance.

Granby was now beginning to enjoy the chase for its own sake. With a smile on his lips and serious eyes, he stepped aside and waited for his enemy, taking cover behind a dressmaker's dummy. This maneuver brought him within five yards of Soly.

Soly, seeing his man, also decided to wait. He had no intention of interfering with Colonel Granby

at the moment. His instructions were definite—to keep an eye on Granby if ever he should be so lucky as to meet that ubiquitous and troublesome individual, and not on any account to lose him again until . . .

The hand of the little Jew slid to his inner breast pocket where a long thin knife reposed in its sheath of stamped Venetian leather work. A lovely weapon that, three-bladed. When you pulled it out, it closed the lips of the wound and the blood dripped inwards. There was no remedy then—no surgeon or doctor could avail.

The fellow was leading him a dance. He was wary. Perhaps he was on his guard. Soly decided to give him a bit more elbow room. He could not strike him in the middle of a crowded shop thronged with buyers. This, was not Munich in 1916, but Geneva in 1928, a very different proposition. But he would stick and stick and in the end there would come a moment. Granby should not get away with it this time—as he had so unexpectedly contrived to do in that noisome alley behind the Frauen kirche during the war.

He must, however, be cautious. Granby was perhaps still unaware that he was being followed.

Soly decided not to let his victim come too near, and he stepped backwards.

That was his mistake, for he trod firmly and with decision upon the toe of a large and respectable matron.

Her reaction was immediate. With a gasp of

agony she placed her large hands in the small of Soly's back and pushed, while at the same moment Granby gently thrust at the dummy behind which he was standing. Soly shot forward as though impelled by a catapult, and in another moment found himself involved in a complicated embrace with a lovely lady, dressed in the latest Parisian underclothing.

"Thinks he has got hold of something good at last," chuckled Granby.

But the face pressing against the face of Soly was of cold wax; a sightless pair of glass eyes stared unwinkingly into his own, while a mop of burnished red hair, which had once formed part of a six-inch rope, tickled him under the chin. He staggered back, and at that moment a voice spoke mockingly in his ear:

"Pretty sinister, old boy. Take grandfather's advice: always distrust a woman with red hair and black underclothes."

Soly, with desperate efforts, righted the mannequin, but found himself involved in a crowd of excited buyers, dominated by an impressive shopwalker, over whose left shoulder he caught a glimpse of the departing Granby. Granby, like Agag, was walking delicately, but like Elijah, he had gathered up his loins and was moving forward with the speed of a trained athlete.

"At last," said Granby. "I have found the great entrance which corresponds."

He passed quickly into the street. He had already made up his mind to lose no more time. What was

the address of that tobacconist? Number 210 Rue du Rhône. Well, here was the Rue du Rhône. He looked at the numbers and discovered that the odd ones ran down the opposite side. He therefore turned to his left and in a few minutes' walk stood in front of number 210. It was a small shop, wedged in between a high-class fish and poultry shop and the remains of an Oriental carpet store which had gone into voluntary liquidation some months previously.

With a quick glance to right and left Granby pushed open the door and entered. A little man with the complexion of a potato, a receding chin and watery blue eyes greeted him.

"M. Dubois?" inquired Granby.

"At your service, Monsieur," replied the little man.

Granby put his hand in his pocket and produced the letter. The eyes of the little man narrowed as he saw it.

"Eh bien, Monsieur," he said. "That is my letter. Monsieur will pay me the £25 sterling?"

"I have yet to see what you have to sell me, my friend," replied Granby.

"It is wonderful," said the little man, "cheap at the price. It contains information of the most important."

"Let's have a dekkko," said Granby.

"Comprends pas, Monsieur."

"Display the goods," said Granby.

"But certainly, always, Monsieur," said the little

man. "I have it here in the drawer. You see it now for yourself. It is worth how many?"

Whereupon he thrust into Granby's hands a small green packet of Three Castles Cigarettes—quite ordinary, except for a few pencilled hieroglyphics on the outer cover.

Granby looked at the packet for a moment. Then, without a word, he produced his notecase and handed over to the little man five rustling notes of the value of five pounds each. M. Dubois expressed his gratification, but Granby cut him short.

"When's the next train for London?" he asked in French.

CHAPTER III

THE PACKET OF CIGARETTES

Richard Merrill of the Foreign Office arrived at the station in plenty of time to catch the night express from Geneva to Paris. He was a methodical young man as befitted a junior official, and though the train did not leave till 9.40 P. M. and he had booked his sleeper, he was there a good quarter of an hour before the time of departure.

He tipped the Swiss porter who had slung his two suit cases on to the upper bunk of the compartment and, strolling into the corridor, looked through the window, a cigarette between his lips. On the platform a good-natured Swiss railway official, resplendent in blue cloth and gold braid, was good-humoredly assisting passengers to find their seats.

Merril was at ease. He had dined well, or as well as it was possible to dine in Geneva, at a little restaurant near the Cour de Rive, where they had given him a chicken cooked *en casserole* and a tolerable Burgundy. He had not expected to return to London so soon, but the dispute between Poland and Lithuania had come before the Council of the League a day earlier than had been expected. Both parties had in the end been reasonable, and the

questions between them had not taken long to settle. After the meeting, the Foreign Secretary had sent for Merrill and told him to go to London that night, and supplement a written report to the Prime Minister with a verbal account. Merrill had accordingly returned to his hotel, written as accurate an account as possible of the meeting he had attended, obtained an advance copy of the minutes from the harassed precise-writing section of the Secretariat, and here he was on the train.

He looked at his watch. They would be off in a minute—in three minutes, to be accurate. He turned round and glanced at the compartment. He had noted with distaste that he had the upper bunk, but the unknown claimant of the lower bunk had not yet arrived. Perhaps he would miss the train—in which case Merrill would have the compartment all to himself. Merrill hoped devoutly that this would happen, for nobody wants to be sociable in a sleeping car.

At that moment, however, he caught sight of the attendant in his chocolate-colored uniform, and the attendant was talking over his shoulder to a wiry little man with fierce blue eyes and a drawn face.

"It's no use your carrying on like that, Alphonse," the little man was saying. "I might, as you say, have missed the train, but here I am at last. You will now install me in my bunk and produce some of that beer we've heard so much about."

Merril flattened himself against the side of the train, as the attendant and the little man with the

fierce blue eyes pushed past him into the compartment. There was a sudden jerk. The train had started.

The attendant was putting a shabby suit case in the coveted lower bunk. Well, it might have been worse. The stranger was clean and would, Merrill hoped, be moderate with the beer.

Merril looked at him again, and this time found him somehow familiar. He had seen him before somewhere. Then in a flash he remembered. The same man had been on the train on the way out to Geneva, and he had been in the part reserved for the British delegation.

He nodded to the stranger, who shot him a friendly glance.

"I heard you asking for beer," said Merrill. "I'm afraid it's sure to be tepid. It's pretty hot to-night, and I don't think they have got any ice box. This is one of those antiquated sleepers that exist nowhere except on this particular line."

"That's a poor thought," said the man with the blue eyes. "I'm not partial to hot beer. Do you do this trip often?"

"Fairly often," said Merrill, with a suggestion of reserve in his tone. There was no reason to tell this man that he was in the Foreign Office.

"I see," said the stranger, with a twinkle. "Mum's the word, is it? Mustn't give myself away before strangers. Secrets of State, Georgius Rex, and all that sort of thing."

"I have seen you before," said Merrill.

"You have seen me before," replied his neighbor.

"It was in the train coming to Geneva," continued Merrill.

"It was in the train coming to Geneva," echoed the other.

"You were traveling with the Delegation, weren't you?" pursued Merrill.

"I was traveling in its company," said his companion dryly. "But here," he concluded suddenly, "is the beer."

The attendant had entered, bearing a bottle and two glasses. Merrill's companion took the bottle and began to pour out the beer.

"Hullo, Alphonse," he said suddenly, "where did you get that?" and he pointed to the man's hand, across the back of which was a lean scar.

"My name, Monsieur," replied the attendant, "is not Alphonse. It is Jacques, and I have made the war for France."

"Then you must let me call you Alphonse," said the stranger unabashed, "and we will fill that other glass and we will both drink to those who have made the war for France. You, too," he concluded, turning to Merrill.

"If you don't mind," said Merrill. "Beer does not go down very well with me at night."

"Poor fellow," said the stranger. "All the more for us, eh, Alphonse?"

He drained his tumbler and set it down with a wry face.

"Boiling," he muttered. "You could shave in it." The attendant sighed in sympathy.

"But what would you, Monsieur," he asked. "There is no ice. At Bellegarde, perhaps, when one makes the *douane*, we may be able to get cold beer."

"That's a very sound idea," said the stranger. "I suggest you get a couple of large bottles."

The attendant gravely assented and withdrew.

"Well," said the stranger abruptly, as soon as they were alone, "I take it that you're Mr. Merrill of the Foreign Office, Northern Division."

Merril looked at him in surprise. "That is so," he said at last.

"My name is Granby," said the other. "You won't have heard of me. People don't. When do we get to Bellegarde?"

"In about twenty-five minutes, I think," replied Merrill.

They talked in a desultory manner until the train reached Bellegarde. Merrill was puzzled by his companion. Presumably he was in Government service. Anyhow, he seemed to know things. But what was his job and why was he so restless? He was continually breaking off his conversation to take a turn in the corridor. He also demanded information with regard to their next-door neighbors, and seemed reassured when he was informed that they were two old ladies.

At Bellegarde the train stopped for the customs examination. Merrill, having a diplomatic passport, escaped this troublesome formality.

Granby had disappeared, presumably in search of beer, being afraid to trust so important a matter to the sleeping-car attendant. And apparently Granby was right for presently the attendant, who should have been buying beer, came along the corridor and, seeing Merrill alone in the compartment, entered and touched his hat.

"Monsieur has the upper berth?" he said. "I wonder if he would like to be more comfortable elsewhere?"

"Can you arrange it for me?" said Merrill.

"But certainly, Monsieur," replied the attendant. "There is a compartment quite empty at the end of the coach. It is over the wheels, but perhaps Monsieur would not mind that. It is certainly more comfortable to be alone, is it not?"

"You are right," said Merrill. "I will move along at once."

The attendant, without another word, got hold of Merrill's suit case and led the way to an empty compartment some yards farther down.

Merril sighed with satisfaction.

"That is better certainly," he said to the attendant. "I won't forget it in the morning."

"Thank you, Monsieur," said the man, and touching his cap again he withdrew.

Merril began to prepare for bed, extracting from his suit case a pair of silk pajamas, and presently he was comfortably tucked up in the lower bunk with the notes of his report to the Prime Minister in his hand. He read them through once more to refresh

his memory. Then clicking out the light, he composed himself for sleep.

Sleep, however, was difficult. The train pounded and rattled through the night, and being over the wheels every inequality in the badly laid track made itself felt. Merrill, lying awake in his bunk, began to think that he might after all have been better off with that man, Granby, in the top bunk of the middle compartment.

It had been rather churlish of him to move off without saying a word. But Granby was probably just as thankful as he was to be alone.

Presently he fell into an uneasy doze, but the jerking of the train prevented him from any sound sleep, and he awoke somewhere round about midnight, feeling thirsty. There was water, he remembered, in the wash place which separated his compartment from the next. He got out of bed, thrust his feet into a pair of slippers, and opened the communicating door. As he switched on the light in the tiny compartment and began to look for the water bottle, he thought of Granby and his beer.

That brought him to the attendant—a very obliging man, the attendant. Knew his job and was prepared to make things as comfortable as he could. Wounded, it seemed, in the great war.

Merril took the glass from his lips and found himself staring at his reflection in the mirror. Wounded in the great war! Why had he suddenly remembered that? Something had impressed it vividly on his mind. That was why it recurred so im-

pertinently. It was that scar, of course, on the right hand to which Granby had drawn attention. He could see it still.

That was what had so suddenly startled him—almost without his knowing it. For he had seen the scar on the hand of the man quite plainly as he poured out the beer for Granby, but as he now remembered, he had not seen it later, when the man had taken down the suit case to bring it to this other compartment. He had noticed the hands of the man on that second occasion very particularly, for one of the suit cases was heavy, and Merrill had been in doubt whether he should not help the man to lift it on to the bunk. And his hands had been white, and there hadn't been any scar!

He put down the glass. Why should he bother himself about a detail like that? Could he really be sure, and, even if he were sure, what did it mean? Merely that there was another attendant, that was all. One attendant was very like another, and perhaps they had been changed at Bellegarde. Odd, how the mind worked. He hadn't noticed any difference between them at the time, and yet here he was quite vividly impressed by it in retrospect.

He grasped the door handle in order to regain his compartment, but suddenly paused to listen. What was that? A faint but urgent sound of tapping from behind him which could be heard above the ordinary noises of the train.

He swung round. Yes, there was no doubt of it. Some one was tapping in the next compartment.

That was an odd thing to do. Why did the person, whoever it might be, tap on the panel instead of getting up and opening the door?

There it was again. Merrill bent his head to listen more closely, pressing his ear to the door, and as he did so he heard, above the noise and rattle of the train, another sound which caused him to draw in his breath sharply, a low moaning, not much more than a whimper, from the compartment beyond, on the other side of the door.

Merril gazed in consternation at the shut door, from behind which he had heard that curious sound, as though he were trying to pierce the solid glass and the wood beyond. The feeble tapping sounded once more.

On that he pulled himself together. Obviously he must get hold of the attendant. Some one was ill next door. They might perhaps be able to find a doctor on the train. He returned to his berth, and put on an overcoat over his pyjamas. Then he opened the door into the corridor and slipped out.

There was no one to be seen. The coach was running fast, jerking and rocking on its bogies. Merrill, after looking in vain for the attendant, returned to his compartment and rang the bell. It rang practically next door to him, or so it seemed, for his berth was almost at the end of the coach. Still nothing happened. After a moment he moved back into the corridor and, walking to the end, peered into the little niche, with its padded leather

seat, where the night attendant usually sits. It was empty. Where had the fellow got to?

He retreated from the cubbyhole and walked up the corridor. Obviously he must find out what was wrong with his neighbor. He tried the door of the compartment next his own, finding, however, as he expected, that it was locked. He would have to enter through the wash place if that were possible. He went back to his own compartment, and going into the wash place, listened again with his ear to the panel, half hoping that he would hear nothing. But once more there came to his ears that feeble tapping and moaning on the other side.

He himself tapped and called:

"Is anything the matter there? Can I be of any assistance?"

For a moment the tapping ceased, but there was no answer to his question, and presently the tapping began again, more urgently than before.

Merril hesitated no longer. He tried the handle of the door and found it would open.

"Excuse me," he said. "Can I come in?"

There was no answer, but the moaning was now distinct, and Merrill opened the door wide.

The compartment into which he looked was dark, but a shaft of light from the wash place in which he stood showed him a pair of feet wearing black shoes, well-polished, but rather worn, and blue socks held up by suspenders, one of which was mended with a piece of string.

Merril moved into the compartment, and lean-

ing across the prostrate man put his hand on the switch above the bed. He pressed it the wrong way, so that, instead of the strong light which should have flashed out from the roof, came the ghostly blue gleam of the night light. It was sufficient, however, to show what had happened.

The owner of the black shoes was lying on the floor, his face half hidden and in deep shadow. He appeared to be wearing some kind of nightcap, but Merrill, his skin beginning to tingle, saw that the man's hands were lashed behind him so tightly that the finger nails were black and the cord half embedded in the wrists, and that what he had mistaken for a nightcap was a towel taken from the wash place and twisted in the form of a gag across the man's mouth.

Suddenly the bound figure with an effort rolled over on its back, and Merrill looked into a pair of dark eyes, dull with pain. Quickly bending down, he dragged away the towel. The man sighed feebly.

"*Vite, Monsieur,*" he said barely above a whisper. "*Les laches . . . les bandits . . . ils m'ont mas-sacré.*"

But even as he spoke the man's head fell back and he fainted dead away.

Merril looked helplessly about him. This was a pretty situation. There must be a gang of international thieves aboard. He had read of such cases. They were reported at length in the *Continental Daily Mail*, and in the French press they were picturesquely described as "*Les rats des wagon-lits.*"

He stumbled back into his compartment, falling on one knee in his haste as the train lurched. In his bag was a pair of nail scissors. Armed with these he returned and got quickly to work. The cords were stiff, and it took him some time to get the man free.

As he worked he noticed the man's hands. On the back of the right one was a long scar. It showed black in the dim blue light. So they had tied up the attendant. They would naturally start with him, and then they could rob the passengers in the sleeping car at their leisure. As the last strand parted, the man stirred and his eyes opened.

Merril darted back into the wash place and returned with a glass of water. He put a hand under the man's head and the rim of the glass against his teeth. The man was fully conscious now.

"The bandits," he murmured, after drinking the water. "They struck me on the head in the corridor."

"How long ago?" asked Merrill.

"I don't know, Monsieur. Hours I have been lying here, it seems . . . hours."

"It must have been soon after we left Belle-garde," said Merrill. "You remember moving my suit case from berth number 12?"

"I never moved your things, Monsieur," replied the attendant.

"Is there another attendant on the car?" Merrill inquired.

The man staggered to his feet.

"No one but me," he said, and then suddenly he added, "but where is my uniform?"

In his shirt and underclothes, he moved blindly to the door. It was locked. He turned back and brushed quickly past Merrill into the wash place and so into Merrill's compartment with Merrill at his heels.

"Be careful," said Merrill. "Where are you going?"

The attendant would not listen. Already he had got the door of Merrill's compartment open, and had stumbled into the corridor. He was muttering something about his uniform and the pistol he kept in his cubbyhole.

"I'm going to stop the train," Merrill suddenly decided.

He reached up and caught one of the brass handles, the pulling of which without adequate cause entailed certain penalties, according to a notice neatly set out in French, German and English. The handle moved down about six inches, but for the moment nothing happened.

Merril went quickly into the corridor. Where was the attendant? There was a man moving down the corridor not twenty feet away to the right, a man in a chocolate-colored uniform.

Merril started after him, moving silently in his slippered feet, reached him a moment later, and tapped him on the shoulder. The man swung round. His face, in the white light of the corridor, was startlingly clear, and it was very different from

the face of the man whom Merrill had just released.

"You are not the attendant," began Merrill, but he did not finish his observation. Something hard was pressing against his ribs, and he realized rather sickly what it was. The man in front of him had thrust an automatic there.

"Hold your tongue," said the man savagely.

At that moment there came a tremendous shock. There was a jar, a grinding and screeching of brakes, and the train checked so suddenly that Merrill fell flat on his back, with the false attendant on top of him. A hand gripped his throat, choking the breath out of him. He at once forgot all about the pistol and hit out desperately. The rest was all a fine confusion, in which he suddenly caught sight of a leg, trouserless, with a garter that held up a blue sock, poised high above him and swinging forward as though for a hearty kick. That, thought Merrill, is the real attendant. The pressure on his throat relaxed, and sitting up, he heard a pattering of feet and saw the real attendant, still in his underclothes, hastening down the corridor and the false one running swiftly ahead of him.

Moreover, from somewhere or other, a third man had joined the false attendant. They were in full flight together. The arrival was behind the other, so that Merrill could see the back of his head as he ran. It shone red in the light of the corridor, being of a fiery auburn, as in a picture by Titian.

The fugitives, with the real attendant in pursuit, had disappeared round the end of the coach by

the time Merrill was on his feet. He was about to follow when a loud voice came suddenly from the compartment close beside him. It was his old compartment, Number 12. The door was flung abruptly open and Colonel Granby appeared. He was in pyjamas, and he seemed to be highly indignant.

"Hell's Bells!" he roared, on catching sight of Merrill. "Who was it stopped the train?"

"That was me," said Merrill. "There are thieves on board."

"Thieves," exclaimed Granby.

He turned and put his hand quickly under the pillow of his bunk.

"All is well, young man," he said. "You stopped the train in time."

"I don't understand," said Merrill.

"My gaspers, man. My lovely gaspers. They might have pinched my gaspers."

And he held up for the bewildered Merrill's inspection a packet of Three Castles Cigarettes.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONFIDENTIAL TAXIMAN

"Yes, old boy, not at all bad, but I think they have rather overdone the mushrooms."

Granby surveyed his sole with appreciation.

"I like this place," said Merrill.

"I'm glad you're glad," returned Granby, looking with a twinkle at his companion, who was a little flushed.

Beside them a Romanée Conti, lying in its wicker basket, gleamed through the dust and cobwebs of twenty years.

"A thought old for Burgundy, if you follow the modern fashion, but 1908 was a wonderful year," murmured his host. "I suggest that a little later on we just wet the nose in Perrier Jouet '17. That will go down rather well with the *pêches flambées*."

"You are doing me uncommonly well, sir," said Merrill. "Don't you think . . ."

"You can drop the sir, young fellow," interrupted Granby. "And don't look the good gift food in the mouth. We are out to enjoy ourselves, and I've an idea that last night you saved my life. Chaps that save Granby's life deserve a good dinner."

"It's very good of you to say so," replied Mer-

ril, "but I don't quite see what you mean. You haven't explained it yet."

"Hush," said Granby. "The next one should be eaten in silence."

He eyed the duck and orange salad which had been placed before them with reverence.

Merril settled himself more comfortably in his chair. They were dining at Kettner's, and the dusky gold of its interior, faintly suggestive of the Third Empire, lent a color to Granby's solemnity.

They had met in that place at Granby's suggestion, for in Paris they had been obliged to separate. Merrill, on his arrival at the Gare de Lyon, had been found by a man from the Embassy who had taken him off to see the British Ambassador, who had wished to know what had been happening in Geneva. The result was that Merrill had missed the ten o'clock train to London and had followed Granby on the train which left for Calais at noon. Granby, on parting with Merrill at the Gare de Lyon, had insisted that they should dine together that same evening. So here they were.

Merril looked with an increasing wonder at his host. He had never met the like of him before. He seemed to take nothing seriously. On the train, for example, he had treated that business of the attempted robbery as a sort of joke. The officials, having ascertained that the bandits had actually, it seemed, entered Granby's compartment, had overwhelmed him with questions, but to the scandal of every one concerned, the only thing Granby could

suggest as a step towards securing the criminals, who had slipped off the train the moment it had stopped and disappeared into the night, was that the two ticket collectors and the guard should share with him his remaining bottle of beer.

"Why should you imagine that I saved your life?" Merrill inquired, after the duck had received, as he thought, a sufficient tribute to its excellence.

"It's not imagination," said Granby. "Take it from me that, if you hadn't pulled the communication cord, young fellow, those gentlemen on the train would have made away with Granby. Then they would have left the train at Dijon. Your pulling the communication cord, of course, upset their plans."

"But how do you know they were after you?" asked Merrill.

"They are very fond of me," said Granby. "They simply can't bear to let me out of their sight. Besides, there was the pillow."

"The pillow?"

"Yes. The P.L.M. is, I'm afraid, a pillow to the bad. Soly missed me when the train stopped. But he got the pillow, all right."

"Good God," said Merrill, and he stared hard at the little man opposite, who seemed singularly unperturbed.

"Then it was attempted murder, and you know who it was."

"I know who it was—a very old friend of mine," said Granby. "I should say that now we are about

all square, but I shall win the next hole, with any luck, and that ought to make me dormy."

"Then you think you will meet him again," said Merrill.

"You bet I shall—and pretty soon, I expect. But don't you worry about that. They won't be bothering *you*."

"But why don't you go to the police?"

"The police might lock them up," said Granby.

"You'd feel safer then," Merrill observed.

"I'd feel safer," Granby admitted, "but I should not be feeling happier. It's my job, you see, to find out what these friends of mine are doing. I couldn't do that very well if they were locked up, could I? No, young fellow, as you love me—and you ought to love me after a dinner like this—have nothing to do with the police. And take my advice. Should you ever be in a scrape yourself, don't go rushing off to the nearest police station without thinking twice about it. The police are there when you want them, but if you bring them in untimely you may be sure that they'll be there when you don't."

"You mentioned your cigarettes," said Merrill, his mind straying back to the scene in the train. "Cig-ar-ettes." He repeated the word carefully and with great deliberation, in case Granby had not heard it the first time, for this was a most generous vintage, and one could never be quite certain.

"Cigarettes, to be sure," said Granby. "I wouldn't tell you about them, only I'm quite sure you won't remember it in the morning."

"What do you make of that?" he concluded suddenly, and, as he spoke, he produced from his pocket a little green packet which he tossed across the table for Merrill to examine.

Merril examined the packet with due deliberation. It was a perfectly ordinary packet of Three Castles Cigarettes except that some one had defaced the design upon it with pencil marks.

"Well," said Granby.

"I suppose," said Merrill, "that this is meant to be some kind of message."

"Message," he repeated solemnly.

"Yes," said Granby. "You've done it in one."

"The man to whom this packet belongs," continued Merrill, "has crossed out two of the castles depicted on the shield and he has written the word 'sham' in front of the third. There's a triangle with a dot in it in one corner, and the letters ENG in the other."

"Capital," said Granby. "I note that you can still count up to three. Waiter, Mr. Merrill's glass."

"The letters 'ENG' may be short for England," Merrill went on.

"Wonderful, Holmes," said Granby.

"Not at all," Merrill modestly assured him. "That is nothing."

"Nothing," he repeated carefully.

"Yes," said Granby. "I've got that."

Merril continued. "Then there are these three castles."

"Are you sure there are still three of them," Granby inquired.

Merril looked very carefully at the packet.

"Yes," he said at last. "There are, as I said, three castles, but two of them—yes, two of them—have been crossed out. So now there is one. Two from three is one . . . one castle . . . sham castle . . . Sham Castle, England . . . That might be an address . . . I know of a place like that myself."

Granby leaned suddenly across the table. He was no longer smiling.

"What's that you say?" he said, and his voice was like the crack of a whip.

"It was at Bath," replied Merrill.

"What was it like?"

Merril giggled without exactly meaning to do so. Granby's face, with the fierce blue eyes and the mouth, all at once so stern and eager, struck him as funny.

"It's not really a house at all," he said. "It's just a wall, if I remember rightly, with two towers sticking up. It stands on the top of a hill above the town and it looks from a distance just like the gateway to a mediæval castle. I happened to be there one day and when I went through the gate, there was nothing."

"Nothing," he repeated.

Granby drew back.

"Nobody could live in it—is that what you mean?" he asked.

"Not even a cat could live in it," said Merrill. "I just walked through the gate and found myself standing in the middle of a field."

Granby looked thoughtfully at Merrill.

"You're quite sure about all this," he said. "I mean, you hadn't been lunching or anything just before?"

"Certainly not," said Merrill indignantly. "I'll say it all over again if you like."

"Very well," said Granby. "We will wash out Sham Castle at Bath. There are probably lots of them about."

Merril looked earnestly at the packet again.

"The third castle," he announced, "is not crossed out entirely. It has merely been shortened."

"Shortened," he repeated. "They've knocked the top off it."

"Yes," said his host. "And that's a bit too deep for your Uncle Granby. It means something and I'm going to find out what it is. You may not realize it, young fellow, but that packet cost me, or rather His Majesty's Government, twenty-five of the best."

"Francs?" Merrill inquired.

"Pounds," said Granby. "And I've an idea that it is going to be worth every penny of it."

"What is this triangle with a dot in it?"

"That's an easy one," he said. "It's a sign used by tramps. They chalk it on the back door or gatepost of houses. It means 'Beware of the Dog.' Or

they'll make you chop wood for your dinner. That sort of thing."

The waiter laid some hot York ham, swimming in a wine sauce, before them.

"Devilish good ham," said Granby, "though I say it as shouldn't. You can always trust anything from Yorkshire. Take my tip, old boy, and if ever you're in York go and have a meal at the 'Three Tuns.' Mention my name to Jack Thirsby. He's got some '84 port that would do credit to an emperor."

They ate in silence for a moment and then Merrill looked up from his plate.

"I don't want to be indiscreet, Colonel," he began—

"But you can't help it," Granby interrupted with a smile. "In fact, you're going to ask me all about those cigarettes—where I got them and why they were worth twenty-five pounds and all that sort of thing. But I'm afraid I can't tell you any more. Some day, perhaps, when it's all over. For the moment, we're on pleasure bent. You are going to smoke a large Corona, and to take a short walk with me as far as the Palace. There is a show there which will just suit two ordinary chaps like you and me—what the highbrow critics call legs and tomfoolery, and I like 'em both."

Champagne completed the work of the Burgundy. and Merrill, by the time he reached the Palace, was convinced that Granby was the finest fellow in the world.

Merril would have found it difficult to describe the performance two days' later. He could have testified to the legs. They were numerous and inescapable, and they had a marvelous talent of being able to do the most complicated things simultaneously. Never were legs so shapely or so unanimous.

They adjourned, after the theater, to Granby's club in St. James' Square. There, however, Granby was summoned almost at once to the telephone, and when he rejoined Merrill in the smoking room five minutes later, his merry humor was all departed.

"Sorry," he said, "but duty calls. Most annoying, just as we were beginning to enjoy ourselves."

He put a hand on Merrill's shoulder.

"Let me know where I can find you," he said. "We must meet again."

"The Bath Club will do," said Merrill.

"Good," said Granby. "I'll tell the porter to get you a taxi."

"Don't trouble," said Merrill. "I can walk."

Granby, hoping it was true, took him to the door of the club and watched him benevolently forth. Merrill went down the steps with circumspection. He turned at the bottom and waved his hand with a genial deliberation.

The last he saw of his host was a white shirt front twinkling between the Georgian pillars of the portico.

Then he turned his face towards Jermyn Street.

But suddenly he stopped. He was not now living in Jermyn Street. His rooms were there, of course,

but they were being done up and he was staying with a maiden aunt in Hampstead. He had sent her a telegram and she would be expecting him. Not of course, waiting up for him. Bless her, she wasn't that sort at all. But he had a key and she would wish to see him in the morning.

Very well, he would walk to Hampstead—rather a long way, but it would do him good. He didn't feel a bit like going to bed yet and after such a dinner as he had eaten only three hours ago a little exercise was indicated . . . Indicated . . .

Besides, he liked walking through London at night. There seemed, in its infinite vistas of gray streets and blank houses, to be—how should he put it?—possibilities. That was the word. Poss-i-bil-ities.

There were always possibilities, of course, wherever one might be. Even in a sleeping car, which was really nowhere at all, but merely between one place and another . . . Romance brought up the 9.15 . . . That was Kipling. Fine fellow Kipling . . . the sort of fellow Granby ought to meet . . . They would get on splendidly together . . . Mr. Kipling . . . Colonel Granby . . .

One moment, though. He was walking to Hampstead and he must be careful. Park Lane, Marble Arch, Edgware Road, Maida Vale— Luckily the way was easy to find. Why luckily? Are you suggesting, sir, that I am incapable of finding my way home? . . . No, sir. I live with my Aunt Lavender and the address is 245 Fellowes Road . . .

That was the Marble Arch. Oddly pathetic it looked out there in the open—all by itself and leading nowhere. Used to be a gate, of course, but now it was nothing at all, like that curious place he had told Granby about—the sham castle at Bath.

That had been a capital dinner. One of the better evenings. Even that show at the Palace had been jolly good, though he didn't much care for that sort of thing as a rule. . . . What was Granby doing now? Tracking down the criminals, of course, and probably enjoying himself tremendously. Men like Granby always did enjoy themselves. No ups and downs for a man like that, though life could be very sad at times.

Walking down the Edgware Road, for example, towards Maida Vale—it was not exactly exhilarating, and all those street lamps and the gaunt houses, with the blinds down.

But there it was. He was walking to Hampstead. Somewhere ahead of him, to the right, was St. John's Wood.

That touched a secret memory. Perhaps it explained why he had suddenly decided to walk home. The gaunt houses and the hard pavement were less insistent now. There, under the summer night, lay the Mediterranean. He was in a southern garden with black cypresses, and silver olives and ilex trees. And beside him was a slim girl in white, with dark hair and shining eyes. They were leaning against a parapet of yellow stone and looking down, as from the edge of the world, at the shimmering lights of

Monte Carlo, so tawdry by day and yet so magical by night.

That had been his great adventure. He had known her for three weeks only, but time was not to be measured thus. She had been introduced to him as Miss Elliot and she would not tell him her Christian name, but asked him to find one for her—something English. So he had called her Joyce, though it did not suit her very well, for she didn't look in the least like an English girl, and her father was certainly not an Englishman. Her father, by the way, had not seemed to mind their friendship; he had even lent them the big Rolls to drive about in, and they had lived like princes.

He would never forget that night in the southern air. Strange how naturally it had happened. He had quite simply turned and taken her hands and told her that he loved her. She had smiled, and a moment later was in his arms. That was over a year ago, and he had not seen her since, for she had gone away, suddenly and mysteriously, the next day.

Then, about a month later, had come that letter, thanking him and saying they would never meet again.

But that letter had contained an address—Abbey Road, St. John's Wood—and he had driven there at once, along this very road with the gaunt houses, to find a deserted villa standing in a garden of its own and approached by a semicircular drive.

He could see it now—that quiet house, an empty

shell of a place, and himself knocking and ringing till the door had opened, and he had found himself face to face with a shabby old man, who had told him that he and his wife were the only people there, caretakers for a Mr. Elliot, who occasionally used the house when he came to England.

And from that day to this he had heard nothing, though he had often written and made inquiries.

He had now reached Blenheim Terrace. It was very quiet. He glanced at his watch. It was nearly one o'clock. Aunt Lavender would be in bed and asleep long ago. Bed—that was a happy thought. A taxi now would not be altogether amiss.

But this was the Abbey Road, and there over the way was the house where Joyce had lived with her father. He stood quite still for a moment. There were tears in his eyes. "Richard," whispered a mocking voice in his ear, "you're drunk." He clenched his hands and looked over at the empty villa. "Drunk yourself," he said aloud. "This is the great sorrow of my life."

He crossed the road. Who knew? There might be a light in one of the windows to show it was inhabited again. And if there was a light, he would call and ask for Miss Elliot. No, he couldn't very well do that at one o'clock in the morning. But he would call to-morrow.

The houses were all detached, many of them with gardens in front. Number 37 was the house from which Joyce had written. It was the largest in the square and stood well back from the road, and it

was approached by a drive that was partially concealed by laurels. It was not very light just at this part of the road, the nearest lamp-post being some distance from the gate.

He paused as he reached the drive. The house lay to his right, thirty yards or so away. It was dark and black, and seemingly quite deserted.

Then, suddenly, his eye was caught by a ruby glow in the darkness, like the eye of a strange beast, and to his ears there came a faint chugging, as though the beast were alive and breathing.

His heart leaped wildly. For that was a taxi in front of the door. That must mean that some one was staying in the house. Was it possible that Joyce had come back?

He walked quickly forward. Here, at last, might be, if not Joyce herself, at least a clue to where she could be found; and, at the worst, here at any rate was a taxi.

He approached it cautiously. The flag was up, so presumably the fare had left it and the vehicle was free. The driver, however, did not seem anxious to move on, he was sitting over the wheel, apparently asleep.

Perhaps he was waiting for some one, but if that were so, why had he raised his flag?

Merril looked eagerly past the taxi at the front door. It was tight shut, and the fanlight was dark. Whoever had come to the house in the taxi had obviously gone upstairs and so to bed. There could

be no inquiry to-night. He would call again in the morning.

He stood for a moment in the shadow of the laurels by the edge of the drive, and all at once he thought what a silly fool he was, standing there outside what was obviously an empty house in the dead of night, dreaming about a girl whom he had kissed over a year ago at Monte Carlo. He moved impatiently forward and stepped up to the driver.

"Are you free?" he said.

The man didn't move.

"Here, man, wake up," he repeated. "Can you drive me to Fellowes Road? It's double fare if you do."

There was still no reply.

The man was sleeping the sleep of the just.

Merril put a hand on his shoulder and shook him. The chauffeur leaned forward confidently, as though to speak, and a faint light, from the distant lamp-post, fell on his face.

Merril drew back sharply. The tall house wavered in the shadow.

The throat of the taximan was cut from ear to ear.

CHAPTER V

THE SECRET AGENT

Vladimir Stolin left what he called his base headquarters in Kirbymoorside in a distinctly depressed frame of mind. It was getting dark as he set his face to the road and won to the summit of the moor. Desolate and wild, and yet somehow kinder than the wide plains of his own land, the country fell away from where he stood. Although it was late July, there was a freshness in the air, though very little wind. But the soft color and smooth outlines only emphasized his loneliness. It was a gentle land, but it was alien; and, though it might be gracious to the eye, it hurt the stranger.

Fortune had turned against him in the end. All had gone well with him until a week or so before—too well, perhaps; for fortune was never for long in the same mind and mood. She had allowed him to achieve the impossible. He had rescued Irma and then at the last fortune had turned and robbed him of the fruits of his success.

He had not, in all that adventure, demanded much for himself. That Irma should be saved from the men who had killed her father—that was all he had asked. And fortune, with a great air of

yielding to his desires, had granted that. He had snatched her away from the Tcheka—the Ogpu, as he must call them now—the infamous secret police, who were all-powerful in Russia, so that even Trotsky and the great leaders trembled before them.

He was not likely to forget that escape—the airless summer night, a heavy bribe shared between three drunken moujiks, who called themselves members of the Red Guard; his own audacious masquerade in that uniform of shame with the Soviet star and sickle; his breathless visit to the long, dirty, whitewashed room where the political prisoners were huddled together. Irma had been lying in a corner, her eyes wide open, but seemingly unaware of what was happening about her. He had sworn brutally at the two women beside her, who had been trying—might God reward them—to comfort her in that awful place. She had shrunk from him pitifully, like a child, when she had caught sight of him in his uniform of the Red Guard, but, playing his part, he had seized her by the wrist, and haled her forth with a fair semblance of the brutality that was expected on such occasions. He had even laid violent hands upon her—Irma, the daughter of his old master, who, if there had been no revolution, would now be a princess in her own right, and the heiress of millions.

He had always loved her, unattainable though she had been. And now he was her only friend, to whom she owed her life. But he would never press

that claim upon her. If, at some happier time, now that the barriers were down, she should turn to him in affection—but that was an idle dream. He had yet to finish the work he had begun.

She would never, he hoped, remember anything of that awful night or anything of what had happened afterwards. He had urged her roughly forward, along the length of the room, and she had been followed by the pitying glances of the other women, while the men prisoners had cursed him covertly beneath their breath. So they had passed—out into the corridor, down the stairs, carpetless and of stone, towards the street. To all who had challenged him he had said merely that she was for Comrade Yudenitch, the Commissar. And every one whom he had met had found that amusing—or had seemed to find it so. The reputation of Comrade Yudenitch was well-known. She had followed him unresisting, while they traversed the long dirty street, with its walls of filthy stucco and its shabby unpainted houses. Why, indeed, should she resist? She did not understand. She had not understood or remembered anything since her father had died.

He had taken her to his lair in the outskirts of the city, and, for greater safety, he had given her the clothes of a boy to wear. She had looked very slim and small in that disguise, and she had laughed at it, thinking it great fun to be dressed as a boy.

He had meant, of course, to take her to her friends in England, that land of free men, and help her to forget all the horrors she had endured. And

now here he was, in England at last, with the sun setting and casting long shadows over the unfriendly hills. And he was alone.

For at the last moment, when the worst of the danger was past, he had been infamously, cruelly defeated. He had done everything—got her safely across the frontier, still in her boy's clothes, to Warsaw. And there he had come face to face with Rupert Ahrens, with his red hair and beard, his cold eyes and his silly smile. He should never have gone to the Three White Swans—a most doubtful hostel, but he was known there and it was a natural mistake to make. He was feeling by that time so triumphant, so secure. He had even, with a chuckle, found time to telegraph to the British Intelligence which was always glad to know where Ahrens was likely to be found. And the reply of the British Intelligence had been prompt and imperative. He was to keep an eye on Ahrens, pending further instructions.

But that, of course, had been impossible. He had first had to get Irma safely to London and for that he had needed money.

He had raised it at last; but it had taken him the whole day, and he had been obliged to leave Irma alone, locked up in her room. And then at dusk he had returned to the hotel to find her gone.

He would never experience a shock like that again. He had questioned the host, who had been surly, but had apparently acted in good faith. The young lady had received a message. The message

had, it seemed, purported to come from Stolin himself. It had asked Irma to meet him somewhere, but the host had not been able to remember the place.

Irma had gone without a sign—no clue as to what had happened except that Ahrens might have taken her.

Stolin had gone at last to the railway station, and waited. That had been his only chance, and in a sense he had been justified, for he had discovered that she was not, at any rate, with Ahrens. He had seen her in her boy's clothes, still happy and laughing, in the company of two men, and he had recognized one of them, Count Dmitri Soubiroff, spendthrift and waster, one among the thousands of refugees who had fled from Russia when the revolution had started. And at that very instant the train had moved.

Stolin could still see himself rooted to the platform. Then he had jumped for the last carriage and followed them closely to Geneva. Throughout the journey, however, he had been unable to do anything at all. Those men had, on the face of it, as much right to be in charge of Irma as he had. It had been impossible to appeal to the authorities, to accuse them of abduction. The girl was obviously as ready to go with them as with him and if it came to a question of abduction . . .

So he had followed them doggedly, using all his skill as a secret agent, and he had tracked them to Geneva. There he had for one moment hoped to recover Irma, but all he had found in Soubiroff's

room at the hotel, which he had so daringly raided, was a despatch case containing the man's papers and a letter with an address on them, an outlandish address in England, Sham Castle, Kirbymoorside.

That, at any rate, had been something. Without that address he might in fact have lost her utterly, for next day he had seen Soubiroff take the train to Bale and for a moment had been tempted to follow him. But he had not seen Irma on the train and, suspecting a false trail, he had returned to the hotel to find that Irma was still there with the man he did not know. And that morning they had started for London.

Stolin, from the summit of the moor, looked over the shadowy country to where a light was showing. That was Sham Castle. Every day, since his arrival at Kirbymoorside three days ago, he had gone down to that house, and already he knew something of its inmates.

In London he had tried unsuccessfully to communicate with Irma's friends, and he had naturally thought of Granby—Granby for whom, in a moment of panic, he had scrawled that cryptogram in the tobacconist's shop at Geneva when Soubiroff's accomplice had so unexpectedly entered. But he had, on reflection, been reluctant to call in Granby. The orders from the British Intelligence had been very explicit. He had been ordered to watch Ahrens, and he had disregarded those instructions. The Service was strict and he had hitherto never failed in his

duty. Granby might, of course, be made to understand, but what was Irma to him? Eventually, perhaps, it might be necessary to go to the English police, but this, after all, was his own affair. He had set out to rescue her himself and all his pride, and perhaps his happiness in the future, was staked upon the enterprise. Besides, for all he knew, Soubiroff and his confederates might have a better legal claim to be the protectors of Irma than anything he could show. These men might be in touch with Irma's friends in London and be acting on her behalf. Soubiroff, he was sure, was up to no good, but perhaps in the eyes of the law he was unassailable.

For the moment his course was clear. He must find out exactly what was happening in that house on the moor. Soubiroff, who had not been there at first, had arrived only last night in the storm. The other man, the tall, thin doctor whose name was Shorthouse, had been waiting for him, and now something was bound to happen. There was a third man, short and fat, who wore loud tweeds and spoke in a whining, high-pitched voice, but he had left yesterday in the Morris car and had taken the road to Hull. And with him had gone the man who had brought Irma from Geneva.

So now there were only Shorthouse and Soubiroff and the old woman who looked after them. It ought to be possible to do something. Two men only and no reinforcements within view.

Stolin fingered the automatic in his pocket and

cautiously approached the light that gleamed from Sham Castle.

Irma was in that high room on the left, by the second turret. To-night, somehow, he must get into touch with her. Perhaps, though he was hoping against all hope, she would recognize him again and be persuaded to come away. More probably, however, she would be frightened and scream, and then he would have to run for his life.

That man Soubiroff was masquerading now as her savior. Perhaps she would turn to Soubiroff in the end, for in her present condition she was little more than a child.

Stolin stood for a moment with clenched hands among the heather. If such a man as Soubiroff could aspire to Irma, then he himself, though he was no more than her father's old secretary, need not despair. To think of Irma in that way would have been madness once. But now—he was a good man, every bit as good as the Count.

It was not yet dark enough for his attempt on the house. To cover the interval he turned aside to the small hamlet hidden in a fold of the moor about half a mile from Sham Castle, and entered the local inn. There he called for whisky—a poor substitute for vodka but it would serve.

The landlord was affable, but Stolin was pre-occupied and answered at random. He sat there drinking quietly until it was dark. Then he arose, paid his score and set his face once more to the high moor.

It was now quite dark, but Sham Castle, though its lights were out, showed like a shadow on the sky line. He stole towards it. To-night he must make quite sure of everything. He hoped he would not run into that strange old woman. Yesterday she had seen his face at the window and had gone from her kitchen to alarm the others. This time he must be more careful.

He was close to the house now, stepping lightly as a cat. There was no chink of light anywhere. They could hardly have gone to bed yet. Suddenly his heart went cold. Was it possible they had gone away? But that was absurd. Why should they have brought Irma there, if they had intended to leave almost immediately afterwards? He was growing fanciful.

He turned a corner of the building, and there, in front of him, was the kitchen window. It was slightly ajar, but curtained, and there was a chink of light showing through. Stolin crept to the aperture.

He could see about one half of the interior. It was a large kitchen, with a big old-fashioned range in one corner, and a quantity of shelves painted a buff color. There was a table covered with dirty plates, and, as he watched, the figure of the house-keeper moved into view. Stolin shrank back. She must not see him again.

He moved a little to one side, keeping her in view. The woman went towards the pile of plates and she picked up three or four of them and turned to the scullery as though she were going to wash them.

He now had a clear view of her face, wrinkled and quite expressionless.

Suddenly, however, life came into her eyes, and her figure stiffened. She stood for a moment facing the blank wall of the kitchen, and Stolin realized, with a shock of horrified surprise, that she was talking to somebody—to somebody who wasn't there.

"You take your nasty black face out o' my kitchen, do you 'ear?"

He could hear no more of what she said, but he watched her mouthing angrily at the empty air. Suddenly she flushed red and with a violent gesture she flung the plates she was holding at the wall in front of her. Then she picked up others from the table, one by one, and threw them in quick succession, till the brick tiled floor of the kitchen was strewn with dirty white fragments.

Then she paused, breathing heavily, and leaning against the table, till presently she passed a dish-cloth across her face with a trembling hand.

Stolin shrank away from the window. That was the woman who was looking after Irma—making her bed, bringing her food, folding her clothes. Irma was in the care of a thing like that. The sweat burst in beads about his forehead. He must get her away. . . . Irma . . . alone with those men and that mad creature in the kitchen.

He stole round to the front of the house. It seemed darker than ever after the lighted kitchen. He stumbled, and, to save himself, plunged his hand blindly into a rosebush, and drew it back sharply,

torn and bleeding . . . roses on that desolate moor, growing by the walls of the prison that held his love.

Turning a corner, he found himself on what had once been a terrace. But it was overgrown with weeds. Here suddenly there was light. It streamed from a great Gothic window on his left, fitted, incongruously enough, with big French windows that opened outwards.

Those were the windows, as Stolin already knew, of the main hall of Sham Castle, a sort of general living room, for half the house was now shut up. He had looked in once before, but then it had all been dark, and he had flashed his torch to see what was inside.

He would have to go very carefully now. Fortunately it would not be so difficult, for outside the window was an old bronze cannon, the only genuine object in that house of make-believe, dating from Elizabeth. The man who had built the house had put it there under the vague impression that it looked like a bombard and was therefore a suitable adjunct to a mediæval fortress. It stood in the middle of the window, some three or four yards from it, and piled on each side of it, in a line with each edge of the window, were two pyramids of cannon balls. But the cannon balls were faked, being, indeed, of a slightly larger caliber than the cannon itself.

Stolin had a use for those cannon balls. He dropped flat on his face and began to crawl forward

very slowly and with great care. Presently he was abreast of the nearest pile of balls, his head only a few inches from the ground. Deliberately he pressed it against the pile, so that, if any one was looking, his head would appear to be one of the balls composing the pyramid. Settling himself on one elbow, he peered eagerly into the room. The light was strong, and, for a moment or two, owing to some flaw or trick in the glass, he could see nothing. Then, however, his eyes began to focus, and he held his breath.

There, at last, was Irma. Her dark hair threw her pale face into sharp relief. She was dressed in a plain blouse and skirt, and was sitting in a carved armchair, with a stiff back, her hands gripping the sides, and she was staring in front of her. Opposite her was a tall, lean man, gaunt and sallow, with dark piercing eyes. He was dressed in London clothes, over which he wore a flamboyant dressing gown of green and gold, caught in at the waist with a blue silk cord. He was kneeling beside Irma, holding her hands and talking to her urgently and continuously. His lips moved persuasively; he was talking to her in gentle tones, too low to be overheard; but he was watching her intently and his eyes were merciless.

Stolin's hand went to his hip pocket, but only for an instant. That would be madness, the one way to insure destruction. He must be patient.

What was the doctor saying? He was speaking more urgently and Irma was looking at him with

eyes that had lost their expression of submissive inquiry and were now rebellious. Her face was white and drawn, and suddenly she buried it in her hands. The doctor took a step forward and laid a hand on her shoulder. On that she sprang from her chair and a faint cry came to Stolin's ears. She made a blind gesture with her hands and turning, went swiftly towards the staircase, the end of which was just within his vision.

The doctor stood motionless for a moment; but, as Irma disappeared, he shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands with the gesture of one acknowledging defeat. Then, fumbling in his pocket, he produced a handkerchief and mopped his forehead.

But what was this? The doctor was advancing to the window. Stolin shrank back.

The doctor was close now, so close that, had it not been for the glass, Stolin could have touched the edge of his dressing gown. The doctor reached up. Stolin heard a click and realized that the window was being locked. The doctor then turned away and moved across the hall.

A second later the light went out abruptly.

CHAPTER VI

THE PLATE OF SILVER

For a moment Merrill stood motionless by the side of the chugging taxi, staring at the crumpled figure at the wheel. His hand was sticky—the hand he had placed on the man's shoulder a moment ago. Mechanically, with a reflexive shudder, he wiped it on the coat of the dead man.

Things like this don't happen in London—he told himself—not here in the middle of St. John's Wood.

He bent forward to look again, his weight on his outstretched hands, which were gripping the door of the taxi. The door swung open, and, as Merrill peered at the head twisted grotesquely askew, the body slipped sideways through the door and fell on to the path, brushing Merrill aside.

He stared down at the body, aghast.

He must get help, of course—look 'at once for a policeman.

He stepped away from the taxi, forgetting in his bewilderment to turn off the engine, which was still ticking over slowly.

It was then that he realized with a shock that he was within a few yards of an unknown man—the murderer perhaps. The fellow had his back

towards him and was not attending to him at all. The stranger, in fact, was looking fixedly at the corner of the house, and, following his gaze, Merrill perceived a lumpish shadow high up by one of the windows. The shadow was moving and slowly resolved itself into a man, sliding swiftly and almost noiselessly down a drainpipe.

There came a low whistle and the unknown man on the lawn in front of Merrill took a pace forward, his eyes intent on the figure sliding down the pipe. In his hand was something that gleamed wet in the light from the lamp-post fifty yards away.

Merril realized with horror that the thing he held was a knife and that the man was crouching for a spring which would land him on the back of the second unknown.

There was no time to lose. Merrill darted forward and caught the man with the knife by the knees as he was in the act of springing. The fellow came crashing down on his face, and, as he fell, twisted and turned over, so that in the dim light Merrill could see his features. He had a beard and hair that might have been red.

But the man who had come down the pipe was approaching, and Merrill stared at him in amazement. For he knew the fellow—the fellow who had just come down that water pipe, whose life he had saved. It was Albert Jenkins, his old batman, who had been his servant in the war.

There was no doubt of it. That was Jenkins and Jenkins was speaking.

"Gawd," he was saying, "if it ain't the Captain."

And then he added quickly, "Come on, sir. We must get out of this, quick."

Already Jenkins had a hand on his shoulder and was pushing him towards the taxi, cursing bitterly, as he did so, somebody unnamed, who had slipped off and left him in the lurch.

Merril looked round. Two dark figures had sprung from the side of the house. One of them was coming towards him, with something that swung loose in his hand.

"It's the gang, sir," said Jenkins. "Get into the taxi, for Gawd's sake."

Merril found himself jumping for the door of the taxi. He pulled it open and stumbled inside. Jenkins was already in the driver's seat.

Through the window Merrill saw the first of their pursuers trip and fall over the man he had knocked down. The other pulled up short and bent over the two of them. He saw no more than that, for Jenkins let the clutch in with a jerk and the taxi shot forward down the drive and into the open street.

Merril rose from his knees and sat down trembling. Mechanically he dusted his trousers. There was Jenkins crouching at the wheel and turning his head sharply to the right. Merrill picked up the speaking tube.

"Listen, sir." It was Jenkins voice, low and urgent. "You're a toff, and I'm driving you home—see?" he said.

Merril hesitated a moment. "Very well, Jenkins," he replied.

He sat back. Jenkins would have to explain, but that must come later. His brain was in a whirl, but one fact stood out from all the rest. He had seen that man with the red hair before—the man he had floored, and who had been waiting for Jenkins with the knife. He had seen him—he was not likely to forget it, in fact—on the previous night, in the corridor of the sleeping car. That hair was unmistakable and it belonged to one of the gang who had made the attempt on Granby in the train from Geneva to Paris.

What was the same man doing in St. John's Wood, outside the house of the Elliots, and what was Jenkins himself doing, if it came to that? Jenkins would have to explain.

But first he must be saved from those men who had murdered the chauffeur. That was the least he could do for Jenkins. He had often hoped that he would some day have an opportunity of doing something. Had he not inquired and advertised at intervals during the last ten years, but always in vain? And now this had happened. What had the little man been doing all these years? More than he would care to talk about, apparently, from the look of him. For an instant there flashed upon Merrill's vision a memory of Jenkins as he had seen him on that night in 1917 at Sailly-Saillysel. Hard as nails Jenkins had been then, and not a nerve in his body.

And Jenkins had saved his life—pulled him out of the mud in the full glare of the Very lights and when, a moment later, he had been hit through the ankle, Jenkins had picked him up and carried him safely to cover.

Merril looked again at the figure bent over the wheel—the pasty face, showing every now and then to left and right, the loose mouth and shaking hands.

The thing was incredible, but it was the same man—the man who had saved his life ten years ago.

Jenkins was driving fast. They were now in a maze of narrow streets. How long had they been in the taxi?—ten minutes, perhaps; and now they were slowing down. The taxi stopped and he saw Jenkins climb from the seat, move to the door and open it. Mechanically Merrill got out on to the pavement.

“Now, Jenkins,” he began, “what’s all this about?”

Jenkins looked furtively about him.

“Better come in here, sir,” he said.

He indicated, as he spoke, a dark entrance or alleyway between two lighted windows.

He entered it and Merrill followed him till they came to a wooden door on the right. Jenkins pushed it open and Merrill found himself in a small room, blue with tobacco smoke. It was a tiny café of the lowest kind, a reproduction of many a similar place in Paris or any other great Continental city. Half a dozen seedy-looking men were seated at tables

round the walls. One or two of them eyed Merrill curiously, but they paid no attention to Jenkins, who slipped hastily into a seat by the door and beckoned Merrill to sit beside him.

"Keep your coat well over your shirt front, sir," he said, as Merrill sat down. "You don't want evenin' clothes to come to the Plat d'Arjong."

The proprietor was standing over them, as Merrill retreated into his overcoat. Jenkins ordered brandy, and sat well back in the corner, swiftly surveying the room. They were silent for a time, till the brandy came and the proprietor withdrew.

"Now, Jenkins," said Merrill sharply, "I'm still waiting for that explanation. And I should like to know why I've never heard from you all these years. You knew there was a job waiting for you if you cared to take it."

Jenkins turned a pair of scared, pathetic eyes upon his former master.

"Don't talk to me like that, sir," he said plaintively. "It ain't my fault that things 'as gone wrong with me. I've 'ad the 'ell of a time since the armistice."

Merril looked with commiseration at the pinched ill-shaven face opposite him. He noted, however, that Jenkins was decently dressed in a good suit of dark cloth. There was one curious thing about him. He was wearing black cotton gloves.

Jenkins, catching Merrill's eye upon these last appurtenances, began hastily to remove them. Mer-

ril understood. Gloves like that were worn to avoid leaving fingerprints.

"Jenkins," he said, "you've been committing burglary."

"No, I ain't, sir—leastways not what you might call burglary. I know appearances is against me. But I'm going to tell you the trewth."

Merril sat back. Why couldn't he yet realize that he had all but witnessed a murder? Was he still dazed with the drink he had taken that evening or with the event itself? Since he had tapped that driver on the shoulder in the Abbey Road he had been unable to think clearly at all. There was a murdered man lying in the garden path of the Elliots' old house and there was a stain on his sleeve. And now Jenkins was going to explain.

He must pull himself together, for clearly he would have to do something. He would listen to Jenkins, and then he supposed he would have to communicate with the police.

"Well, Jenkins?"

With a trembling hand, Jenkins put his glass to his lips and drained it at a gulp.

"All right, sir," he said. "But it might 'elp me a bit if you'd tell me what it is you 'specially wants to know."

"I want to know what you were doing in that house at two in the morning and why you were wearing gloves? And I want to know . . ."

Merril shuddered and broke off. He was realizing

it now. Mechanically he looked at the stain on his sleeve.

Jenkins followed his glance and suddenly bent and looked at the cloth. Then he stared with horror at Merril.

"No, sir," he said in a hoarse whisper. "They didn't get 'im, did they? Gawd! And I thought 'e'd just slipped off and left me to face it alone."

"The man with the taxi, you mean?"

"That was my pal—name of Goldenberg. Wh . . . where . . . 'ow did you find him?"

"I saw the taxi in the drive and I thought the driver was asleep. He was not asleep, Jenkins. His throat was cut. He's lying there in the garden."

"Gawd!"

Jenkins' face had gone white and his hands were shaking. He was trying to speak, but the words would not come immediately.

"The men who did that were also waiting for you," continued Merril. "And I believe you know who they are. Do you?"

"No, sir. Honest, I don't. At least, not for certain. Did you see their faces?"

"I saw one of them," Merril replied, "but not very well. It was a man with a red beard."

Jenkins was now white to the lips. His teeth chattered on the glass.

"Red Rupert," he said thickly. "That was Red Rupert."

Merril looked at him curiously, waiting for his explanation. But none came. Jenkins was beckoning

to the proprietor, who, with a prompt understanding of the situation, refilled his glass.

Merril leaned across the table.

"Look here, Jenkins," he said, and there was the old parade note in his voice, "it seems you're in a tight corner. The question is: do you or do you not want me to help you?"

The loose mouth trembled and turned down grotesquely at the corners, as though the little man were about to burst into tears.

"If you need my help," continued Merrill, "you shall have it, but you've got to be frank with me. What were you doing in that house? Who were those men in the garden? And what do you mean to do about the man who was murdered?"

Jenkins sat back.

"All right, sir," he said. "I'll tell you all I can—nothing but the trewth, so 'elp me; but I can't tell you everything. There's too many people in this business, and you wouldn't understand."

"Go on," said Merrill.

"It was like this. Goldenberg—'e's my pal, the man that was murdered—took me to that 'ouse to get something."

"Burglary."

"No, it wasn't. We was only after some papers, and that was all I took."

He touched his pocket as he spoke.

"What papers? To whom do they belong?"

Jenkins' face set obstinately.

"That's jest what I can't tell you, sir," he re-

plied. "I can't mention no names, and that's a fact. I was asked to go to that 'ouse in St. John's Wood and to get them papers. They belongs to a young lady and she needs 'em badly."

Merril bent forward. An eager look came into his eyes. Suppose the young lady were Joyce Elliot? Should he ask Jenkins outright? Perhaps not—not for the moment. These were deep waters. He must see more clearly yet how matters stood.

"Go on," he said again.

"That young lady needs her papers," repeated Jenkins. "They were stolen from her by some Russians, and she can't prove who she is unless she gets them back. I was to get them for her. It was all for the sake of that pore young lady—indeed it was. She can't even get a passport without them papers."

Merril looked doubtfully at Jenkins. He did not see him very clearly in the part of an errant knight assisting a lady in distress.

"This young lady," he said, "why couldn't she get her papers in some other way? Why should she employ you to break into the house?"

"Ain't I telling you, sir? We 'ad to get 'em as best we could. Her enemies is after them. She ain't got a friend in the world, in a manner of speaking."

Again Merrill paused for reflection.

"Where is this young lady?" he asked at length.

"She's in Yorkshire," Jenkins replied. "Stayin' with 'er friends."

"You say she hasn't any friends."

"No, she hasn't—except me and them that sent me to that 'ouse."

"Well?" said Merrill.

"You knows as much as I do now. I went to that 'ouse with Goldenberg. Goldenberg waited with the taxi so as we could get away quick, see? I got the papers easy enough, for I knowed exactly where they was—in a bureau in one of the upper rooms. Then I come sliding down that there drainpipe."

"I see," said Merrill. "And while you were in the house these other men came up and killed Goldenberg. It seems you know who they were."

Again a dull, obstinate look came into the face of Jenkins. But his hands were shaking and he gulped eagerly at the brandy in his glass.

"It must 'ave been Red Rupert what you saw. I knew 'e'd be on my tracks sooner or later. He must have been after them papers, like what I was, and 'e bears me a grudge, 'e does. But that's private, between 'im and me, see? We've 'ad dealings in the past."

"Well, what are you waiting for? Why don't you tell the police. They ought to lay their hands on him pretty soon. You'd better come along with me at once."

"Not to the police, sir. I won't go to no police station, I won't. Besides, it wouldn't do us any good, sir. They done in Goldenberg and going to the police won't bring him back. For Gawd's sake, sir, don't 'ave nothing to do with the police."

Merril was not surprised that Jenkins was shy of the police. Presumably they knew the little man only too well. But ought he not to go to the police even at the risk of seeing his old servant in the dock? He had all but seen a murder, and if he did not communicate with the police, he would be an accessory after the fact. He did not want to get Jenkins into trouble, but there were limits . . .

Then, as the little man looked at him with frightened, imploring eyes, he was struck by another consideration. This Red Rupert whom he had seen in the garden was the man who had attacked Granby in the train on the night before, and Granby had clearly been very anxious not to bring in the police.

Merril was for the moment undecided. Obviously this was a matter which needed some reflection.

How did it all fit in—Granby, the man with the red beard, the incident on the train, the murder of Goldenberg, the papers taken from a house in which Joyce Elliot had lived?

He could, of course, see Granby himself in the morning. That was the best thing. He could tell Granby what had happened and leave the decision to him. Granby was connected with the C.I.D. He would know what to do.

"I can't understand why you don't go to the police yourself," said Merrill at last. "This man would have murdered you to-night and you're obviously scared to death of him. Why don't you try to get him arrested?"

"You don't know what you're asking me to do

or you wouldn't ask me to do it," said Jenkins. "If I was to squeak on Red Rupert, he's precious likely to get me afore the police gets 'im, and if 'e don't, then one of the gang would get me afterwards. Don't you 'ave nothing to do with the police, sir. And don't you 'ave nothing to do with me, neither. You've saved my life to-night in that there garden, and I should be sorry to see anything 'appen to you, now or any other time, as you knows. So you'd better not be seen along o' me after this—see? You came into this business by chance and I advises you to get out of it o' purpose."

"We'll see about that later, Jenkins," said Merrill. "You don't in any case intend to go to the police yourself."

"Aren't I been telling you, sir?"

"Then how are you going to protect yourself? And what are you going to do with those papers?"

"I'm going to take them to the young lady, of course. They belongs to 'er."

He dived into his pocket and produced a large buff-colored envelope with a broken seal. He thrust it into Merrill's hands.

"There you are, sir," he said, as though the envelope were a convincing proof of his story. "That's all I took from the 'ouse, and they're goin' straight to 'er. I'll take them to 'er myself, and I starts for York in the morning."

Suddenly he paused. His eyes, bent a moment previously on Merrill, were now staring fixedly at something beyond him and an expression of abject

terror came into them. Then he jerked his thumb at a large tarnished mirror behind Merrill's seat.

Merril could not imagine what was happening. He looked into the mirror, however, and saw that farther down the room, behind Jenkins, a door which he had not noticed before, had opened. In the doorway stood a man, surveying one by one the occupants of the café. His features in the mirror were not very clear, but Merrill could see that his hair and beard were of a vivid red.

There was a quick sigh and a shuffle from Jenkins and a voice whispering hoarsely in his ear.

"Keep the papers," it said. "I'll write to you *post-restante*, Charing Cross Post Office."

And before Merrill could say a word, Jenkins had risen and slipped like a flash through the door by which they had entered the café.

Merril stared for a moment at the door through which Jenkins had disappeared and back again at the other door in which the stranger had been standing.

The stranger, however, was no longer there.

Merril pushed the envelope into his pocket and rose from the table. Instantly the proprietor came forward and thrust a slate with the reckoning in front of him. Merrill paid as quickly as he could and then slipped quietly through the door by which he had entered and down the passage into the street. Hastily he looked up and down the deserted pavement, but there was no one within view. Glancing

up at the shops on either side of the café, he found himself to be in Frith Street, Soho.

He turned to the right and walked briskly down the street till he came to Shaftesbury Avenue.

He had lost Jenkins, but he had the papers. What should he do with them?

He paused under a lamp and taking the envelope from his pocket, examined it carefully.

To whom did they belong? For a moment he was tempted to break open the envelope, but, after all, the papers did not belong to him, and he felt some hesitation about examining them. But suddenly he was seized with an idea.

These papers had been taken from the house in which Joyce Elliot had lived. He would see this thing to the end. Jenkins was going to York and Jenkins should not go alone. Meanwhile, he would see that the papers were safe. No one should get at them again until he went north himself to claim them.

There was a post office in Holborn which, if he remembered rightly, was open all night. He beckoned to a belated taxi and drove to the address. He entered the post office, pulled out the buff envelope, wrote his own name upon it and posted it to himself at York.

He had burned his boats. He would go to York and Jenkins would now have to consent to that arrangement whether he liked it or not.

He got again into the taxi, and was driven home at last, to the house of his aunt in Hampstead.

CHAPTER VII

THE ADVENTURES OF SLICK JIM

Merril woke next morning feeling vaguely ill at ease, mentally and bodily. He sat up sleepily in the great mahogany bed in the room full of solid mid-Victorian furniture allotted to him by his aunt, and groped for his tea.

Something had happened on the previous day. For the moment he couldn't precisely remember what it was. Then abruptly he realized. Murder had been committed and he was an accessory after the fact. He had moreover (a) to go to York; (b) to call at Charing Cross Post Office for news of Jenkins; and (c) to get into touch with Colonel Granby. Furthermore he would (d) have to call on the Prime Minister and tell him about the Poles and Lithuanians.

He seemed to have let himself in for a busy morning, and he was feeling far from bright. He found it hard to bring his mind to bear on anything so definite as a plan of action. His brain went darting off to things he had seen—isolated incidents that stood out vividly in his memory.

There was Colonel Granby in the train with his tepid beer, the twisted features of the attendant

under the blue light of the sleeping compartment, the red head of the man at the end of the corridor, who had leaped from the train as it drew to a standstill, and the picture that followed was of that same man, full-face this time, with a neatly trimmed beard, standing in the doorway of the frowsy café in Soho. Then came a vision that brought Merrill bolt upright in his bed—the taximan with his walrus moustache and his gaping throat, leaning confidentially over the wheel.

Red Rupert had done that, or perhaps one of the other two men who had been after Jenkins in the garden of the house in St. John's Wood. And Jenkins, though he went in terror of Red Rupert, had insisted that he should not go to the police. Why had he listened to Jenkins? He should, of course, have gone straight to the nearest constable, or have rung up Scotland Yard. But he remembered now. It was Colonel Granby who had turned the scale; for Colonel Granby, too, had insisted that the police should on no account be disturbed.

There was a discreet knock at the door. Merrill started violently and then pulled himself together. He was all nerves this morning. It was only the house-maid. She entered, as mid-Victorian as the furniture, and informed Master Richard that his bath was ready.

Merrill dressed hastily. Breakfast, somehow, did not interest him much. Fortunately he was left alone, since his aunt, an elderly lady, breakfasted in her room. He helped himself to a kippered herring, re-

sisted the temptation to empty the bottle of Worcestershire sauce over it and opened apprehensively the *Morning Post* and the *Daily Telegraph*.

There was nothing in either of these newspapers, however—that was to say, there was no mention of the murder in the Abbey Road. There had not yet, he supposed, been time for it to get into the press.

He traveled by tube to the Strand. The first item on his program was fixed. Whatever happened, he must keep his appointment with the Prime Minister. He made his way quickly down Whitehall. There seemed to be an unusual number of policemen about that morning, and not every policeman, as he remembered, wore a uniform. That man who was walking behind him, for example, in the short overcoat, bowler hat and large boots. He was just the sort of man who might be a plain-clothes detective. Odd how sensitive he was this morning to the presence of that sort of man.

It was said that you could always tell a policeman by his feet. Merrill found himself furtively examining the feet of the men he met. Otherwise he might perhaps have noticed the seedy street hawker who walked some thirty yards behind him down the length of Whitehall and who loitered unobtrusively at the corner of Downing Street while Merrill went in for his interview with the Prime Minister.

The interview was short. He did not even see the great man, who was too busy, but was received by one of his secretaries, to whom he gave a rapid and,

as he afterwards hoped, coherent account of events in Geneva.

A quarter of an hour later he was again on the pavement. He acknowledged with a mechanical lift of the hand and a queer sinking in the stomach the salute of the constable on duty outside Number 10; and walked very deliberately down the short street and so again into Whitehall.

At the corner he paused. He was now a free man. There was no need for him to go to the Foreign Office, since he was on leave for a fortnight. But there, over the way, was Scotland Yard. That was all very well, however. Scotland Yard was not on the program, and, if he went to the police, Jenkins would be implicated. That was a poor thought. And it was nonsense about his being an accessory. If it came to the point, he could always bring in Colonel Granby. Colonel Granby had told him to keep the police out of this Red Rupert business and Colonel Granby must have a good deal of influence at Scotland Yard. Meanwhile Jenkins was in danger, Jenkins the knight errant, serving an unknown lady in distress, an unknown lady who had left her papers in the house where Joyce had lived.

He must get into touch with Jenkins. He would go first to Charing Cross Post Office. Then, if Jenkins had not had time to send him a letter, he would seek out Colonel Granby.

Abruptly he turned and strode up Whitehall towards Trafalgar Square and, passing St. Martins in the Fields, entered the Strand. He would have to

prove his identity, of course, before he could get a letter, but luckily he was wearing the same suit in which he had traveled the day before, and his passport was still in his pocket. He pushed open the swing doors and entered the post office.

As soon as he had disappeared from view the street hawker who had plodded patiently up Whitehall and across Trafalgar Square thirty yards in his rear, took up his stand on the curb and, hanging a little wooden tray in front of him, laid out a variety of bladders shaped like pigs, some of which he proceeded to inflate.

Slick Jim was, for the moment, a happy man. This was a soft job he had got this morning—five quid a day, simply to keep the young gentleman in sight. At this rate he hoped the young gentleman, in whom Rupert Ahrens was taking so lively an interest, would walk from Land's End to John o' Groats.

James Hepburn, known to his friends and to the police as Slick Jim, had accepted the job with alacrity.

"Follow that man," Red Rupert had said, "and don't lose sight of him. Here is five pounds, and you will get the same every day till you are called off. And mind, no violence."

To this last recommendation Slick Jim had cordially agreed. Violence was not at all in his line, and he had been greatly relieved when on the previous evening Rupert had restrained Soly Levinson from knifing the young gentleman in the alley of

the Plat d'Argent. Picking pockets in a genteel manner in the L. C. C. trams or on busses during the rush hours was what Slick Jim preferred. And Rupert had remembered that too for, when Slick Jim had returned, after having seen the young fellow safely to a large house in Hampstead at two A. M. in the morning, Rupert had enjoined him not to forget his particular art.

"If you get a chance to go through his pockets," he had said, "please make the most of it and bring me what you find."

So far no such chance had offered, and Slick Jim had been content merely to watch his quarry . . . Five quid a day. By all means let the young fellow walk about as much as he liked.

And there, as it happened, he was again, and he had a letter in his hand. He must have come to the post office to get it, and when a smart young gentleman with clubs and more than one good address has letters sent to a post office there must be more in it than met the eye. Red Rupert would probably like to see that letter, and he would be pleased with the man who got it for him.

Slick Jim hastily assisted the dying struggles of an inflated pig and set the tray on the curb.

Merril was standing on the steps of the post office. He slipped a finger under the flap of the envelope and tore it open.

Slick Jim edged softly near. Merrill had unfolded the paper and was reading. There were only a few hasty lines:

Meet me with the buff-colored packet at the "Long Man," York. I will wait for you there from 6 P. M. from the 29th onwards. For God's sake, sir, don't fail me.

Your respectful servant,
Albert Jenkins.

And, underneath, scrawled in capital letters, was written: "Burn this."

Merril had a sudden vision of little Jenkins, with his white face and frightened eyes, scribbling this in some filthy attic. "For God's sake, sir, don't fail me." That meant he must follow those papers to York and carry out in cold blood the plan he had so hazily conceived on the previous night when he had posted the buff-colored envelope. If, on the other hand, he went to the police, Jenkins, having stolen the buff-colored envelope, would be on the mat, quite apart from that other little business of the murder which might involve them both in suspicion.

He looked again at the note he had received from Jenkins, and as the postscript caught his eye, he decided that at least he would carry out that piece of advice and burn the sheet at once. Then he would seek out Colonel Granby, as he had already decided to do, and make a clean breast of everything.

He slipped the letter into its envelope and produced from his waistcoat pocket a patent cigarette lighter, a little silver-plated thing containing a wick and a small reservoir of petrol.

Slick Jim watched these proceedings with misgiving. He had already decided that the letter was of

value and his sense of the value increased five hundred per cent. when he realized that the young gentleman was going to burn it. One did not burn one's correspondence in the Strand. Obviously that letter must be secured and there was no time to lose. It went against the grain to be so unprofessional, but this was a case for immediate action. Once he had got the letter, its owner would be unlikely to protest—if it was as compromising as all that.

Merril, after two or three ineffectual attempts, had got his cigarette lighter to work. He stepped back to get a little shelter from the door of the post office where there was no wind. It was a bright day, hot and cloudless. He held the envelope in his left hand and applied the flame to one corner.

Just at that instant, however, a dirty hand came over his shoulder and the message was snatched away. There was a quick patter of footsteps, and, looking up, Merrill was just in time to see a ragged little rat of a man disappearing round the corner into Gatti's Restaurant.

"Stop, thief!" Merrill strangled the cry in his throat. That would not do at all. The last thing he wanted was to draw attention to himself. He must get that letter back without making too much fuss about it. This was a matter between him and the fellow who had snatched it.

He started in pursuit on the instant, moving quickly for the revolving door of the restaurant and laying his hand on the brass bar. He gave it a vigorous push and heard a startled exclamation. A

substantial gentleman, who was clearly not accustomed to be hurried, was making a stately exit, and Merrill's impetuous assault upon the door had swung it violently into the old gentleman's posterior, without, however, causing him to abate the majesty of his advance. For a moment it seemed that the irresistible force had met the immovable mass. At last, however, Merrill, free of the door, stumbled forward into the restaurant.

It was empty save for two or three waiters in their shirt sleeves flicking tables. One of them approached, but Merrill brushed him aside. His quarry was just disappearing by the door into Adelaide Street, at the farther end of the restaurant. Merrill dashed down the whole length of the interminable room. In the center under the gallery stood a magnificent major-domo in a braided coat. He came forward deferentially.

"The gentleman," he began, "is pressed for time."

"Sorry," said Merrill, as he gathered speed.

The major-domo stepped discreetly aside, but not soon enough to avoid the large cruets which Merrill overturned with his coat in passing.

"There's somebody joined the Mustard Club, at any rate," thought Merrill, who was warming to the chase.

He shot through the door and looked quickly to right and left. Good. There was the fellow—still well in view, making off towards Chandos Street. The way was fairly clear and it would not be difficult to keep him in view.

Merril started to run his best, feeling pretty sure of his man. It was not, however, as he soon realized, to be so easy as one would have imagined. That seedy little guttersnipe could run, by Jove.

What on earth did he want with the letter? Such considerations must wait. The urgent thing was to catch the fellow, and it looked as though that was going to demand all his attention for the next few minutes. Already he had swept round into Chandos Street, thence into Bedford Street, and so through into Henrietta Street, and he had scarcely gained on him at all.

Henrietta Street was more crowded. The thief, still thirty yards ahead, dodged round a group of persons standing on the pavement and made for Covent Garden Market at the end of the street. Merrill, dashing after him, met a number of clerks coming from the various publishing houses, and walking in the opposite direction to himself. He pushed his way through and presently found that his only path to freedom lay between two gentlemen who were standing engaged in conversation. Without compunction or excuse he drove his elbows into the waistcoats of the astonished gentlemen and using them as a very effective fulcrum, shot from their involuntary embrace and sped onwards to the end of the street, just in time to see that the street hawker had doubled and was disappearing into St. Paul's Churchyard by the gate which stands to the left of the "Pink 'un."

Merril ran through the arch into that green asy-

lum. The only way out was directly opposite, but the hawker was now lost to view. Round the semi-circular steps and under the broad eaves of the church an open-air service was in progress. The thin notes of a tiny harmonium were almost drowned by the voices of the Covent Garden porters and market women who stood in the sun, singing lustily, led by the vicar in a white surplice. Merrill continued to run, as he hoped, with reverence, and heaven rewarded him as he slipped through the congregation, vouchsafing him a glimpse of his man passing through the arch into King Street and turning to the right.

The fellow must have the wind of an ostrich. And, by Jove, it was devilish hot running in an office suit. At last, however, he was beginning to gain. All he needed now was a fair field and no favor.

But, alas! Here was another and a different concourse, gathered about the steps of the National Sporting Club. Merrill was barely ten yards behind his man, but between them there had suddenly streamed from the red doors of that formidable institution a crowd of men of various descriptions, all cheering wildly and trying to shake hands simultaneously with a large man in a gray suit, with padded shoulders.

Merrill, caught in the crowd, found himself looking towards a heavy red face, with a great jaw and a big dent in the nose.

"That's Kid Bishop," came the voice of one of the onlookers. "The Brooklyn Bruiser. Knocked the

stuffing out of Sid Wapping last night, 'e did, down at 'Oxton."

"So that's the Brooklyn Bruiser, is it," thought Merrill, and he turned instinctively aside, too instinctively as it happened, for he collided with a large man in a bright yellow waistcoat and a pink collar, who, without wasting time to expostulate, pushed him as violently away. Merrill staggered, tripped over the foot of another member of the crowd and realized that the next moment he would be in the arms of the Brooklyn Bruiser.

The Brooklyn Bruiser that morning was in a playful mood. He received the young man who had lost his balance with the utmost geniality, and Merrill, as his head crashed into something that looked like a vivid sunset and felt like a brick wall, found himself in the grip of the man who had knocked the stuffing out of Sid Wapping, while a dozen clamoring men looked on enviously at the young man who was shaking hands with the one and only Kid Bishop.

"That will be something to remember, that will," said an enthusiastic gentleman with a large carbuncle in his tie-pin, as Merrill, recovering what was left of his hand, turned to look once again for his quarry.

The latter had by this time reached the open market and was looking over his right shoulder. Merrill dashed forward and in a moment found himself surrounded on all sides by overflowing baskets of fruit and vegetables. The whole scene was alive and vivid under the hot sun. In his nostrils was the

acid scent of green refuse, the tang of oranges and raw whiff of onions, while in his ears were the cries of the salesmen and the rumbling of great carts. Porters were moving about in every direction with huge piles of baskets on their heads, deliberately and with a heavy grace.

At any other moment Merrill would have been enchanted. Here men had cried their wares since Roman times. But at the moment he had no leisure for historical reflections.

He never quite knew how it happened, but suddenly, full in his path, there moved towards him majestically the largest porter he had yet seen, with a pile of baskets on his head which scaled the empyrean. It reminded Merrill abruptly of nursery days when he had played the game of building a tower with bricks as high as it would go. He did not exactly jostle the man, but a collision was imminent and to avoid it both of them stopped abruptly. Newton's first law of motion instantly came into play and the lofty pile of baskets assumed an attitude similar to that of the leaning Tower of Pisa. The porter did his best and for a few moments he performed a series of movements which reminded Merrill of a juggler he had once seen balancing a cannon ball on the end of a long pole. The man stepped this way and that, but in vain. The leaning pile disintegrated and the next minute it seemed as though the sky were raining baskets. Merrill was buffeted over the head and shoulders by cauliflowers and marrows and, through a shower of emerald let-

tuces, descried his quarry at the other end of the market, making apparently for Long Acre.

“’Ere, you,” said a voice in his ear, and Merrill found himself confronted by the indignant porter. He had assured himself a moment ago that he would never again see a man as large or as red in the face as the Brooklyn Bruiser. But now he knew better. This one appeared to be about eight feet high and four feet thick, and he had a fist like a mangle-wurzzle, which he was exhibiting, as though for inspection, about six inches from Merrill’s nose. An appreciative audience was forming to watch the event, including another porter with a similar pile of baskets who had been following his mate, and who now stood with a broad grin on his face about ten yards away.

Automatically Merrill’s hand went to his inside pocket. He whipped out his notecase and thrust a pound note into the great fist, which ceased to wave and opened like a water lily beneath the rays of the sun. There came a voice, hushed as in wonder, from somewhere above his head:

“Blimey,” it said, “if it ain’t a thick ’un.”

An instant later Merrill had the impression that the vegetables were raining again—vegetables of the heaviest description, prize potatoes with the earth of the field still clinging to them, and that they were striking him between the shoulder blades. He gasped and turned his head. The huge porter was standing above him, ready to pat him on the back again.

"You're a gen'leman," he was saying. "And I seen that fellow you was after. I seen where 'e went, I did."

A finger of the size and thickness of a banana pointed across the market to the end of the little street.

"Down the chube," repeated the porter. "That's where I seen him."

"Much obliged to you," Merrill said, and, almost mechanically resuming his pursuit, he saw, standing in contemplation, the porter's mate with the second pile of baskets. The man moved delicately forward and stopped suggestively in Merrill's path. But Merrill perceived the maneuver.

"No, you don't," he muttered, and, swerving well away from the hopeful victim, he dashed into the tube station.

By George, there was his man already in the lift.

Merril bounded forward, but just as he reached the lift, the automatic lattice-work gates clanged together, and for a moment he stood facing his adversary through the bars. Then the lift began to sink and the little man, vulgarly triumphant, placed the fingers of his right hand to his nose.

Merril turned from the lift and bolted at once for the stairs. Fortunately for him the tube station at Covent Garden is near the surface and he had not far to go. He reached the platform to find a train drawn up. People were coming from the white-tiled passage leading to the lift. On the farther

side of them he again caught sight of his man making for the train.

"I've lost him now," thought Merrill.

"No, by Jove, I haven't," he said aloud, for just as the man reached the platform there was a shout of "Stand back, there," and the door of the compartment shut with a sweet sound of bells. The train moved off and gathering speed disappeared with a roar into the tunnel.

Merril hastened towards his adversary. He had the fellow now. The little man was breathing heavily and turned sharply upon Merrill as he came up.

"Now, then," Merrill began, "you'll just hand that letter over to me, if you don't mind."

Abruptly he stopped, however, for over the little man's face there had spread an expression of abject terror.

"Gawd, sir," he said, in a clipped Cockney accent, "duck your 'ead, quick."

Without thinking, Merrill obeyed, but only to receive his opponent's knee under the chin. The blow sent him staggering back and a light laugh came to his ears.

"Lumme, what a softy."

The blow had taken Merrill so completely by surprise that for a moment he stood staring stupidly at the figure of the little man who was disappearing in the direction of an opening in the wall over which was to be perceived the inscription, "Exit to stairs."

Merril started to run again, making now for the staircase. In front of him he could hear footsteps

echoing round the spiral. Thank heaven, there, at last, was the street. Merrill shot into it to be met by a wave of summer heat, for it was now nearly noon.

There was his man, no distance away, and walking. The pace was beginning to tell. The fellow caught sight of Merrill, however, as he shot out of the exit, and started to run again. Would this never end? Merrill felt that he would be unable to last much longer.

They were running up Long Acre now. At the corner of Endell Street the man in front, who was again beginning to lose ground, turned sharply to the left and went in the direction of Broad Street and the New Princes Theater.

Merril put on a spurt. The way was clear and it was now only a question of speed. In another moment he would have his hand on the man's collar and it would be by no means a gentle hand. Soon there was scarcely a yard between them.

The man in front evidently felt the approach of doom, for, with a sudden twist, he shot off at right angles, and leaving the pavement took to the road. They were in Oxford Street now, and the people were thick on the ground.

There came a sudden shout and Merrill paused.

A huge motor bus had drawn level with him and he caught a glimpse of the driver, whose face had turned suddenly from red to white and whose teeth clenched tightly beneath his moustache as he bent down and tore at his brakes. Then, immediately

following the shout, came a scream of pain and horror which ended as abruptly as it had begun.

Merril stood by the curb, trembling all over. The motor bus skidded softly to the right and stopped. There were faces all about him, and dimly the figure of a huge policeman with white sleeves to his elbow loomed in front.

He was aware of all this as in a dream. For at his feet, horribly distinct and dreadful in death, lay the body of the man who had robbed him, the head smashed to a pulp, where the wheel of the motor bus had passed over it.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FALSE FRIENDS

"Let me through," came a sharp voice in his ear. "I'm a doctor."

Merril felt himself thrust aside. There, in front of the crowd, a man in a light overcoat with a bowler hat was kneeling over the body.

The doctor rose, dusting his trousers mechanically.

"Instantaneous," Merrill heard him say.

Two men in dark blue uniforms, with white brassards with the red cross on them, now appeared, as though by magic, elbowing their way through the gathering crowd and bearing a stretcher. They laid it down.

Simultaneously Merrill became aware of a large policeman who, with several of his kind, was now in charge of the situation. Merrill's first clear thought was of the efficiency of the police. They had sprung up faster than the brood of the dragon's teeth.

He felt a hand upon his arm.

"Excuse me, sir," said one of the policemen, touching his hat, "but I shall want you as a witness of the accident."

Merril pulled himself together, fighting down the sickness in his throat. He must act, and act pretty

quickly too, or the police would soon be finding that letter addressed to Richard Merrill, Esq. And that would never do.

"All right, constable," he said. "I want to make a statement in any case. I'm in the Foreign Office—Richard Merrill is my name." He produced a card as he spoke and handed it to the constable.

"Where will you be taking . . . him?"

"Stand back there," said the constable in lordly tones.

"They'll be taking 'im to Bow Street, sir," he continued to Merrill. "They'll be putting 'im on the slates."

"The . . . er . . . slates?" repeated Merrill.

"Mortuary," said the constable. "It's there 'e'll be identified. Ever seen 'im before, sir?"

Merril shook his head.

"Not till this morning," he replied. "But ten minutes ago he picked my pocket in the Strand."

"What's that you say, sir? Picked your pocket. Then 'e probably 'as something of yours on him now."

"It was nothing much," said Merrill. "But I should like if possible to recover it. It was a letter," he concluded rather lamely.

"Well, sir," said the policeman, "if you'll just step along to Bow Street, we will soon fix that up for you. The body will be searched at the station and, if there's anything on him which you identifies, the sergeant will give it you back. All you'll 'ave to do is to sign for it."

The constable beckoned.

"My mate will take you along, sir."

Merril followed the policeman's mate, as large but less talkative than his companion. The stretcher was already well in advance. Merrill, in reaction from his previous horror, found himself wondering why all the London policemen were so large and thick.

He stole a look at himself in the mirror of a shop window as they walked past, and automatically settled his tie. Beyond looking rather red in the face, his appearance was singularly unaltered by the events of the morning. He was very hot and sticky, however, and he suddenly decided to lunch at the Bath Club and have a swim beforehand. Then he would see Colonel Granby. But first he must at all costs recover that letter. Luckily he had put it back in its envelope, so it would be merely an ordinary letter addressed to him. All he had to do was to show that he really was Richard Merrill, and that was quite easy, for he had his passport.

He entered the police station where he was kept waiting for about ten minutes in the charge room, a bare whitewashed place with a big wooden desk at one end occupied by a solemn sergeant. The whole place smelled of soap, and the various regulations pinned to its walls were neither decorative nor inspiring.

A man in plain clothes entered, and placed a variety of articles on the desk in front of the sergeant, who raised his head.

"Mr. Merrill," said the sergeant.

Merril rose and approached him. Why did policemen have such loud suspicious voices?

Merril told his story quite truthfully, except that he altered the details of the manner in which he had lost the letter. He informed the sergeant that it had been taken from his pocket.

The sergeant believed him.

"I am sorry, Mr. Merrill," he said, "but I'm afraid you will have to attend the inquest. We will notify you in due course, but it won't be for some days yet. Fortunately, however, there will be no difficulty. The police will supply evidence of identity."

"You know the man?" said Merrill quickly.

The officer nodded.

"Yes," he said, "we know the man, all right. That was Slick Jim, a well-known pickpocket. He's been sent down I don't know how many times."

"Now, sir," he went on briskly, "I expect you are busy, and I know I am. Just have a look at these things, will you?"

A variety of objects lay before Merrill on the desk, including a shabby pocketbook, some pieces of string and one or two envelopes. Merrill recognized his own immediately, and he picked it up.

"This is mine," he said. "You will see my name on it, and here's my passport to show you that I'm really the Merrill to whom the letter is addressed."

The sergeant glanced at the passport and nodded.

"That's all right, sir," he said. "Is there noth-

ing else of yours? You haven't missed a fiver by any chance?" He pointed as he spoke to a small pile of silver weighting down a £5 note.

"Those were in his trousers," he said.

Merril went through the form of searching his pockets, though he knew very well that his money was intact.

"No, sergeant," he replied at last. "That's all he took, and of no use to any one but me. He doesn't seem to have been so smart at his job as you make out."

"Well," said the sergeant, "we all have our off days, don't we?"

Merril, as he signed a receipt for the letter, wondered whether the sergeant was referring to him or to the pickpocket.

They parted with mutual expressions of good will.

Merril, as the door of the police station closed behind him, breathed a sigh of relief. So far so good. But henceforth he was going to keep his eyes open and he now looked cautiously about him. There was no one of his acquaintance, however, that he could see. Ten yards away on the other side of the street was a public house. He crossed the road rapidly and entered it. A drink was indicated, and he ordered a whisky and soda.

Then, pulling out Jenkins' letter, he read it through again, and, taking a match from the bar, lit it, burned both the letter and the envelope, and drank off his whisky and soda. That was better. Now he could face the world. First, he would have

that lunch he had promised himself at the Bath Club, and then he would get into touch with Colonel Granby. Or perhaps he might be able to get Colonel Granby at once and then they could lunch together. He owed Colonel Granby a lunch.

Merril left the public house and began to walk slowly down Bow Street, towards the Strand. A taxi crawled past him with its flag up.

"Taxi, sir?" said the driver, leaning forward. Merrill stood for a moment in doubt. It seemed a pity to take a taxi on such a fine day. He shook his head at the driver. To his surprise, however, the man suddenly bent forward and addressed him.

"Better take a taxi, sir," he said. "Albert Jenkins wants you awful bad."

"What's that?" said Merrill sharply.

"It ain't far to go," continued the man, in a hoarse whisper, "and 'e's in a bad way. That's what I was to tell you as from man to man. You just get into my cab and I'll drive you to him, straight. You'll be there in a minute or two. Soho way, it is."

Merril hesitated. Was he or was he not going to stand by Jenkins? That was the question.

"Very well," he said at last.

The man thrust his hand behind him and opened the door. Obediently Merrill entered the taxi. The door slammed and the taxi moved quickly off into Tavistock Street and so towards Covent Garden.

"In for a penny, in for a pound," thought Merrill, as the taxi turned this way and that. "I must see this thing to the end. Perhaps Jenkins had at

last made up his mind to go to the police and wanted support."

The taxi turned into Shaftesbury Avenue and swung to the right, past the Palace Theater, and then to the left again, until they reached a little street behind, and parallel to, Frith Street. The taxi drew up with a jerk, and the man, leaning back, opened the door.

Merril got out and looked about him.

"Up them steps, sir," said the taximan. "You'll find 'im waiting for you there."

Merril saw that he was opposite an establishment which called itself Gonzago's High Class Hotel. The place did not inspire confidence, but that was hardly to be expected. The plaster was peeling off the walls, the steps were unwashed and the curtains in the dingy windows were frowsy. Merrill looked doubtfully towards the entrance. Why had Jenkins changed his plans? Jenkins had asked him to go to the "Long Man" at York. What could have happened to make an earlier meeting necessary?

At that instant, however, the glass door of the hotel was pushed open. A man dressed in what he doubtless considered to be the height of fashion came hurriedly down the steps towards Merrill. He wore a bright blue suit with white stripes on it, and a pinched waist. His tie was purple and secured by a large gold ring with an off-colored diamond embedded in it. His boots were bright yellow and well pointed, with cloth uppers. The face of the stranger was not inviting. It had an

obtrusive nose and a retiring forehead; and the smart appearance of the man was somewhat marred by the fact that he had neglected to shave that morning.

"Mithter Merrill?" he said inquiringly. He spoke with a thick lisp.

"That is my name," said Merrill, eyeing him distastefully.

"It is very good of you to come, sir," replied the stranger. "We won't keep you more than a minute, but there's somebody we both know will be very glad to see you."

Merrill moved forward up the steps into the hotel, and in another moment found himself following the sinuous back of his conductor across a hall that smelled of stale beer and spirits and up a winding stairway. The stairs were narrow and covered with a faded green carpet.

They climbed in silence to the second floor. Then the man he was following pushed open a door on the landing to the left, and stood aside, motioning him to enter.

Merrill walked forward into the room.

A man who had been seated by the window rose and took a step forward to meet him. This second individual was dressed in rough serge and in place of a collar and tie he wore a bright red muffler round his neck. There was about him an indefinable air of the sea. On one of his fingers was a plain gold ring.

"Sit down, Mr. Merrill," lisped a voice in his ear.

The man in the blue suit was pushing forward an armchair, upholstered in shiny black cloth. The room was a private sitting room, shabbily furnished. There was a worn Axminster carpet on the floor, and the drawn curtains were of grimy Nottingham lace. The room was airless and close, the windows appearing to be shut, and owing to the drawn curtains, was in twilight.

Merril refused to sit, but stood waiting, his hand on the back of the armchair.

"Well," he said shortly. "Where is Jenkins?"

"One moment, Mr. Merrill," said the man in the blue suit. "We won't keep you more than a moment. Let me introduce you. This is my friend, Mister Jean Dupin, late of the French Navy. My name is Levinson," he added, "Solomon Levinson."

Merril bowed slightly.

"*Qu'est-ce qu'il dit?*" said Dupin to Levinson. "He ask for Jenkins, isn't it? Then tell him quickly. Let us not play ze farce."

Levinson turned to Mr. Merrill with an odd mixture of insolence and deprecation.

"Our friend Jenkins," he said, "does not for the moment happen to be here. But we are his friends, you understand, and we need your assistance."

Merril looked hard at Levinson.

"You say Jenkins is not here?" he asked.

Levinson nodded.

"Then what do you mean by bringing me to this place under false pretences?" demanded Merrill.

"We are his friends," repeated Levinson. "We are

anxious about him. It is true that he is not here; in fact, we don't know where he is at the moment. That's why we ventured to ask you to give us a few moments of your valuable time. We thought that perhaps you could help us to find him."

"I don't understand," said Merrill, making no attempt to hide his irritation. "How on earth should I know where Jenkins is, and why should I help you to find him if I did?"

Levinson spread his hands.

"You also are his friend," he insinuated. "It is essential to find Jenkins. Jenkins is in danger."

Levinson paused and looked at Merrill as he said this.

"You will realize," he went on, "that we are all just a little anxious. After what happened last night. . . ."

Levinson paused and looked significantly at Merrill, who stared at him in silence.

"Yes," said Levinson. "You see, we know what happened last night. You need not therefore be afraid to trust us absolutely. Jenkins came to us, after leaving you in the Plat d'Argent, and he told us everything."

Levinson looked aside to Dupin for confirmation.

"Jenkins was afraid," said Dupin, nodding his head. "His fear was, in effect, considerable."

"That," continued Levinson, "was only natural—after what had happened. And Jenkins now is wanted."

Merril's heart missed a beat.

"Wanted!" he echoed. "You don't mean that the police . . ."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Merrill. But that's what I do mean," said Levinson.

There was a pause. "Well," said Merrill at last, "what has all this got to do with me?"

"Nothing, Mr. Merrill. But it did just occur to us that you might know where Jenkins is—that you might even perhaps be giving him shelter."

He spoke the last words slowly, watching Merrill carefully as he did so, and smiling affably.

Merrill opened his cigarette case, pulled out a cigarette and lit it. Why were his fingers trembling? That was ridiculous, for he, at any rate had nothing to fear. Should he, perhaps, be frank with these men? They were the friends of Jenkins and seemed to know a good deal about him.

"I'm sorry," he began, "but as a matter of fact, I haven't the slightest idea where Jenkins is to be found. I haven't seen him since he left that place in Soho."

Levinson sat down on the edge of the table, swinging his feet. How yellow his boots were. Where on earth did one get a pair of boots like that? The man was not smiling now. He seemed suddenly less amiable.

"It is a pity," he lisped, "that you don't know where Jenkins is. We believe you, of course, but it is a pity."

Then he suddenly leaned forward.

"You realize what this means, Mr. Merrill?" he

went on. "Murder is a nasty thing. It doesn't do to be mixed up in a thing like that. You take my advice, Mr. Merrill. We will take care of Mr. Jenkins. You just tell us what we want to know and leave it to us. You shan't be worried again. You can just leave it to us."

"I really don't see what you're driving at," said Merrill.

Dupin, who had left the window and wandered to the other side of Merrill and who now stood with his hands in his pockets, suddenly thrust his face unpleasantly near.

"Where is Jenkins—zat is vat we want to know. I tell you to say quickly where is zat man."

"Do not mind my friend, Mr. Merrill," interrupted Levinson. "He is anxious about Jenkins and he does not think you are telling the truth."

"I'm sorry," said Merrill, "but I don't propose to waste my time trying to convince him."

"That's quite all right, Mr. Merrill," continued Levinson. "You say you don't know where our friend has hidden himself, but perhaps you can give us a clue. What did he say to you last night? What are his plans? We know what happened in the Abbey Road. Jenkins told us all that himself. But what exactly what he was doing in that house. . . ."

"Then he didn't tell you that?" said Merrill quickly.

Levinson shook his head.

"Our friend was very much upset. He was not himself, as you might say, not himself at all. And

now we want to help him, but we are all in the dark."

Merril looked at the man opposite him, trying to read the expression in his eyes.

Levinson continued.

"All we know," he said, "is that the police are on his track. He'll be wanted for burglary to start with, and they'll have him for murder too, if we don't do something to help him, and we can't help him unless we know the facts."

"Jenkins is innocent," said Merrill.

"Of the murder, perhaps," said Levinson, "but not of burglary. He was in the house, all right."

"But he took nothing away," said Merrill. "He was merely after some papers."

Dupin leaned forward, thrusting his hands deep into his trouser pockets. Levinson ceased to swing his yellow boots and slipped lightly from the table and stood with his legs apart, looking down at Merrill.

"That's all very well," said Levinson. "But he'll have to prove it, you know, and his record is not as good as it might be. I hope you are quite sure—about the papers, I mean."

"I can swear to that," said Merrill. "He gave the papers to me."

Dupin made a quick movement forward, but was instantly restrained by Levinson.

"I'm glad to hear it, Mr. Merrill," he said softly. "It's a weight off my mind."

He paused and added still more softly, "You

couldn't by any means show us the papers, Mr Merrill? They may be rather important, you know.

Merril looked at Levinson in astonishment.

"I'm sorry," he began—

At that moment, however, the door opened quietly and a man stood on the threshold. The newcomer was directly facing Merrill, and the other two had their backs towards him.

Merril stopped dead in his speech.

Levinson bent eagerly forward.

"Go on, Mr. Merrill," he said.

But Merrill was in no mind to continue, for standing in the doorway was the man with the red hair, the man whom he had seen for an instant in the corridor of the sleeping car, the man whom Jenkins had described as his worst enemy, the man whose presence in the Plat d'Argent the night before had caused Jenkins to fly in panic from the room.

CHAPTER IX

THE SKIRTS OF EMILY

Levinson and Dupin swung sharply round as they caught sight of Merrill's astonished face. The man with the red hair moved a step forward.

"This is all wrong," said Merrill to himself. "That is Red Rupert, and Jenkins is more afraid of Red Rupert than anybody in the world."

But the man by the door was speaking. He talked with a kind of giggling drawl, and nothing moved about him except his lips. The rest of him was completely immobile. There was an elaborate gentility about him as of a person who studied refinement in all its branches.

"I'm sorry to intrude. But I didn't know you had a visitor, Soly. I'd better come back later, perhaps."

He looked for a moment at Merrill with his expressionless light gray eyes. Then he turned and left the room as silently as he had entered it.

Merril took a step backwards. His heart was beating uncomfortably fast. This would not do at all. It began to look uncommonly like a trap. These were not the friends of Jenkins. They were the friends of Rupert Ahrens.

Levinson waited until the door had closed and then said quietly, "Well, Mr. Merrill. You were going, I think, to show us those papers."

"You are not Jenkins' friends at all," Merrill began stupidly. He had not yet begun to realize the implications of the scene.

Levinson looked at him doubtfully a moment.

"You are quite right, Mr. Merrill," he said at last. "We are not exactly the friends of Jenkins. But we have the same interests. We too wanted the papers in that house last night, and we have just as much right to them as he has. Unfortunately, however, Jenkins got there first."

"Then it was you who . . . who killed Goldenberg?" said Merrill.

"No, it wasn't," said Levinson sharply. "And if you've got any ideas on that subject, you'd better keep them to yourself. Do you understand?"

He paused a moment, resuming his seat on the table and leaning forward towards Merrill with a confidential air. Seeing him in that position, with his ungainly figure and long, drooping nose, Merrill was fantastically reminded of a baby elephant, stooping to take a bun from the hands of a small child.

"I want to talk about those papers, Mr. Merrill," he continued. "You told us a moment ago that Jenkins gave them to you. I suggest you now hand them over to us and forget as much as you possibly can about this business. I shall then have much

pleasure in calling a taxi, and I think I can promise that you won't hear anything further from us or anybody else—including the police. You've got yourself mixed up in a very unpleasant affair, Mr. Merrill, and my advice to you is to get out of it at once and to stay out."

"You'll call that taxi at once, if you don't mind," said Merrill.

He turned, as he spoke, to the door, but Levinson at once stepped down from the table and stood in his way.

"Not so fast, Mr. Merrill," he replied. "You'd better realize at once that you're not going to leave us without handing over those papers. Come, now, be reasonable."

He hesitated a moment, and then continued:

"The papers are of no earthly use to you, and I've told you that they don't belong to Jenkins. To me, on the other hand, they're worth a good deal. They might, shall we say, be worth fifty pounds or so if I could have them without any further trouble."

He slipped his hand into his breast pocket as he spoke and produced a pocketbook. "Fifty pounds is not a big sum, but every little helps in these difficult times, and your tailor perhaps would be glad of a little something on account."

"You infernal little haberdasher," said Merrill, suddenly losing what remained of his temper. "Get out of my way."

He moved quickly towards the door.

"Stand back, Mr. Merril," said Levinson.

There was a brief scuffle, in the course of which Merril gratified a wish which had been growing on him for some time, of getting his fist well home on Soly's nose. It was his last free act, however, for, as the blow fell, he was torn violently back, so violently, in fact, that his coat slipped from his shoulders, pinioning his arms. He was aware of a grip on his ankles, and he staggered back and fell heavily to the floor. The next moment Soly was kneeling on his chest, while blood from the long nose dripped unpleasantly on his face.

"Go through his pockets," said Levinson.

He gripped Merril's throat as he spoke, and squeezed his windpipe. Merril, breathless from his fall and the impact of Soly upon his chest, began to lose consciousness. A discolored patch on the ceiling was growing larger. Its edges began to wave like a dirty cloth in a high wind. He had a vague impression of hands groping in his pockets. Then the pressure was relaxed, just as he was on the border line. He found himself jerked into a sitting position, and he heard a voice from far away saying:

"I cannot find the papers. They are not in his pockets."

That was Dupin. The man's breath was hot in Merril's ear. And now Dupin's hands were at him again. Merril began to struggle feebly. He was jerked roughly to his feet and fell staggering against the wall.

"This is awkward, distinctly awkward," said Levinson.

He walked over to Merrill, who was leaning against the wall, half supported by the back of a horsehair sofa.

"Those papers," said Levinson accusingly, "are not in your pockets. Where are they?"

Merril stared uncomprehendingly at the man in front of him. He was feeling a little sick from the handling he had received, but he was only waiting till he could recover his breath. Then he would start again. On no account would he yield an inch to these ruffians. He was too angry to be afraid. He even felt an inclination to laugh feebly at the sight of Levinson, whose threatening air was somewhat marred by the fact that he was holding a large orange silk handkerchief to his nose.

"You can go to hell," Merrill muttered feebly.

Levinson rapped out a word in argot to Dupin, which Merrill did not understand, and in an instant they were at him again. One arm was twisted behind his back and a streak of pain stabbed him suddenly like a hot knife, leaving him shaking and deadly cold. Again it stabbed, shooting along his nerves to his heart and brain. It was unendurable.

Then, suddenly, he was loose again. He staggered and would have fallen had not Dupin held him up with a hot hand thrust against his face.

Merril realized that his ankles were bound by a strap, and that his hands were fastened behind him with something else—a piece of rope, perhaps.

"Now, Mr. Merrill," Levinson continued. "That was only to show you that we mean business. You are completely in our power, and you're going to tell us where those papers are."

Merril's head was a little clearer now. This was ridiculous, of course, about being in their power and all the rest of it. Things like this did not happen in a London hotel in broad daylight. There were men he knew who were now going to the club for lunch. He gazed about him uncertainly, wondering what he should say to Levinson, and instinctively he tried to look more vacant than he need have done. He even sighed, as though at the limit of his powers and closed his eyes.

But they were not going to give him any time. There was a light clatter of crockery and before he knew what was happening, he received the contents of a water jug over his head and shoulders.

"That'll vake him up a bit, perhaps," came the voice of Dupin.

The water cleared Merrill's head, but it didn't tell him what to say. There seemed to be no way out, but one thing was certain. He was not going to give in to these bullies.

"I'm not going to tell you anything further," he said. "You can make up your minds to that, and you'd better let me go. Or else . . ."

"Or else you'll scream the place down," put in Levinson. "Don't you believe it, my friend, but just listen to me. I am not going to mince matters. You will tell me where those papers are or Dupin will

get to work on you again, and Dupin has rather peculiar tastes. He likes hunting people. Knows how to do it, too. His fancy at present is thumbs. Did you ever hear of Wilfred Childs? He sthang a sthong about Thora's thawing her thumb away. That sounds funny when I say it, doesn't it? You've noticed, Mr. Merrill, that I lisp when I speak? Men of my race often do, but they are not always funny, Mr. Merrill, and they can be very obstinate, as you know. We generally get what we want in the end."

He paused.

"You can't saw a fellow's thumbs off in a London hotel," objected Merrill, saying the first thing that came into his head.

"It is a simple operation, Mr. Merrill. And we shall see that you don't make any noise. You won't be able to speak, but there will be a pencil and piece of paper handy, so that you can write down the answer to my question with the right hand. The left hand will be at the disposal of Dupin."

There was a soft click and Merrill saw that Dupin had produced from his pocket a knife that did not seem to be either very sharp or very clean. He looked steadily at Levinson. The almond eyes were implacable, and the red mouth under the drooping nose was set in a thin line.

"I'll give you half a minute to make up your mind," concluded the little Jew.

Levinson pulled out an imposing gold watch and placed it on the table. He then took from his pocket

the orange silk handkerchief, while Dupin advanced upon Merrill with the knife.

Merril gazed at the two men incredulously. They were in earnest. He realized it now.

But what was that? Some one was opening the door. Was it perhaps . . .

He looked quickly round. Yes, there was Rupert Ahrens. He stood once more upon the threshold. He paused at sight of what was happening, but this time he made no move to withdraw. On the contrary he came into the room, walking with a light quick step on the balls of his feet. Within a yard of Levinson he stopped and looked at the group with his pale eyes—at Dupin, who, with the knife in his right hand, was now gripping Merrill by the collar with his left; at Merrill with the white face and rumpled hair; and at Soly with the handkerchief spotted with blood from his nose, which he was rolling into a ball to be stuffed if necessary into Merrill's mouth.

"Dear me," he said. "This, I believe, is what they call the psychological moment. May I venture to inquire, Soly, what you are proposing to do with this gentleman?"

The voice was smooth and his manner was that of a sarcastic housemaster talking to schoolboys. There was nothing harsh or menacing in his tone, and yet for the first time Merrill felt a thrill of fear. Levinson's bullying had left him merely bewildered and enraged, but this smooth little man with the red hair and the rosy face filled him with

a crawling sensation of terror which he could neither define nor control.

"Well," prompted Red Rupert softly a moment later, as none of them spoke.

Soly moved uneasily and thrust the handkerchief into his pocket. A moment ago he had seemed entirely sure that he was acting for the best, but he looked now like a small boy that had been caught in the pantry.

"You were, I presume," the smooth voice evenly pursued, "requesting this gentleman for information."

He bent forward and with his forefinger delicately tapped the blade of the knife that Dupin still held open in his hand. The gesture was fastidiously playful.

"Soly," he said, "I'm surprised at you."

Soly became suddenly voluble in self-justification.

"That's all very well, boss," he protested, "but this man knows where the papers are and you said yourself . . ."

But Red Rupert cut him short, and his voice was like the crack of a whip.

"Fool," he snapped. "Hold your tongue."

"I was only asking myself," persisted Soly, though the spirit was obviously out of him.

"Don't. Ask yourself a question, my dear Soly, and you're likely to get a damn silly answer."

Red Rupert was apparently pleased with this sally. He giggled slightly and held up a plump white

hand. Merrill noticed that the nails were beautifully kept.

"That's quite enough, Soly," he continued. "We will speak no more of this, though I scarcely like to imagine what this gentleman will think of these proceedings. I can assure him, however, that I deplore them quite as much as he does. Physical violence may sometimes be necessary, but I do so dislike that sort of thing, and the methods of our friend Dupin are . . . crude."

Again he tapped the open knife with his finger.

"Put it away, Dupin. I find it most embarrassing. You will hardly believe it, Mr. Merrill—that is your name, is it not—but when I realize what you have so fortunately been spared, it makes me feel quite uncomfortable. I'm so sensitive. However, that is all over now and Mr. Levinson is going to unfasten the strap round your ankles while Dupin puts his knife to a better use than he had intended and cuts the cords round your wrists."

Levinson and Dupin came forward and did as their leader suggested.

"I'm sorry, Dupin," continued Red Rupert more genially.

"He looks so disappointed, don't you think?" he added, turning to Merrill. "I expect Mr. Levinson will have told you. He has a fancy for thumbs."

He paused and tapped his forehead with a plump white finger.

"Not quite . . . not quite . . ." he went on, "you understand what I mean. But Mr. Levinson,

of course, ought to have known better. He's over-zealous—that's what it is, and as Talleyrand said, '*Surtout pas trop de zèle.*' "

Was this the man at the mere sight or even mention of whom Jenkins was struck into a palsy and concerning whom Colonel Granby had shut up like an oyster? He did not seem so very terrible. And yet—

Merril looked again at the rosy face and the pale eyes, the small plump hands that so delicately gestured. Why had the man released him? What was all this talk of thumbs and Talleyrand? He would soon begin to lose all sense of any connection or reality of things. One of those two men must be a murderer—either that man with the big nose or that other man with the red hair and the gentle ways. But of course it couldn't be the man with the red hair, because he was so sensitive.

Merril looked stupidly at his free hands. Yes, those were his thumbs, all right. They were still there.

"Well," he said, a little uncertainly, "I imagine that you are now going to open that door and see me out of this hotel."

Red Rupert looked at him whimsically.

"Not immediately," he said. "We shall have some further conversation together presently. But first I want you to have a little time for reflection, and I'm going to suggest that you should retire for the moment to a room upstairs. Mr. Levinson will show you the way."

"You have no right to detain me here," protested Merrill. "And you'd better mind what you're about."

Red Rupert smiled.

"I've no doubt, Mr. Merrill," he said, "that your warning is well meant, and I know that these proceedings are somewhat irregular. But I'm afraid we have no choice in the matter. I don't approve of Levinson's behavior, but he was right in one respect. We really do need those papers, Mr. Merrill, and I think we may require your assistance in other directions. But we will discuss that later. There's only one thing I would ask you to get quite clearly in your mind. I do most certainly intend that you shall help us as far as it lies in your power to do so. There I am completely in accord with my . . . er . . . colleagues. But my methods are different. They are quite as effective but they are different."

He giggled slightly.

"You'll know me better soon," he went on. "For I'm going to be very frank with you. I like to be frank—frankness is my long suit."

Here was a fellow who liked the sound of his own voice, thought Merrill. The words came dripping softly from his mouth like oil from a can. The impulse to bluster and threaten died out of you, as he spoke. Oil on the troubled waters—it was no use raising a storm. But he could not go like this—without a word.

"By God," said Merrill suddenly, "you'll let me out of this or . . . or . . ."

He groped for a suitably devastating conclusion,

while Red Rupert watched him intently, with an encouraging smile on his lips.

"Yes, Mr. Merrill," he said. "I'm quite aware of all that. I must let you out of this or you don't know what you'll do. Neither do I, as it happens."

"Soly," he continued, "perhaps you would take this gentleman upstairs."

Levinson advanced upon Merrill who, with a helpless gesture, walked obediently forward. He wanted to be alone—to think, to get away from this man with the pale eyes and the white fingers. Once outside the door . . . He would for the moment take things as they came. That was the only thing to do—take things as they came.

Dupin pushed the door open and he went out into the corridor.

"To the left," said Levinson, "and up these stairs in front of you."

In the corridor Merrill stopped abruptly.

"Don't put your finger in my back," he said irritably.

"It is not my finger," lisped the little Jew. "It's my gun, and it will go off if you play any tricks."

Merril said nothing to this, but went up the stairs, and then up another flight. They appeared to lead to attics or servants' quarters, high up under the roof.

Levinson called on him to stop and, kicking a door open with his foot, pushed Merrill inside.

The door was shut and Merrill heard the key turn in the lock. Looking round, he found himself in

what was evidently a servant's bedroom. It contained the minimum of furniture—an iron bed with dirty blankets, a single chair and a washstand on which stood an enameled jug and basin, from which most of the enamel had scaled, leaving large rusty patches. There was an old curtain of shabby cretonne, covering an alcove in the wall, apparently designed to serve as a wardrobe. There was no window, only a skylight which was thick with dust and cobwebs.

Merril, distrusting the chair, sat down on the bed and buried his throbbing head in his hands. Hours seemed to have passed since he had alighted from the taxi. That vivid chase from Charing Cross to Oxford Street seemed to belong to another existence, and yet he could not recollect what had happened in between. How, for instance, had he come to this place? But of course he remembered it now. He had taken a taxi. That was it. He had simply taken a taxi. You just got into a taxi and then this sort of thing happened. Scandalous. . . . He would complain to the authorities about it. No, he mustn't do that. He was, for some reason, to avoid the authorities, though that was difficult because policemen were always so very large.

He looked at his watch. It was only just one o'clock. That was lunchtime, and he had been going to lunch at the Bath Club. Heavens, how tired he was. How his arms ached . . . and his wrists . . . and above all his throat, where Soly's fingers had pressed his windpipe. He prodded his neck gently,

and then, somehow, despite the uninviting nature of the bed, he found himself lying on it, staring up at the dirty skylight.

What was that? A white elephant with a drooping trunk and a red beard where the tusks should have been. It was kneeling on his chest, trying to crush the life out of him. He was surprised that an elephant should weigh so little. No, it was not going to crush him. It was going to strangle him with its trunk. He must make a fight for it. But that was so difficult, because there was no weapon—except, of course, the clasp knife. He would have to make do with that. He must saw the trunk . . . saw . . . and saw . . . until he had sawn it off.

He found himself awake, his hand lifted in front of him, and on his wrist was his watch, the hands pointing to half-past two.

He sat up on the edge of the bed and ran his fingers through his hair. There was a foul taste in his mouth and the little attic was hot and stuffy. He rubbed his eyes and staggered to his feet. Where was he? That needed a moment's reflection. He had been in so many places lately—but none quite so nasty as this one. It called itself, if he remembered rightly, Gonzago's Hotel, and it was down Soho way—so the taxi driver had said. And there were some men downstairs who wanted to know what he had done with the papers which Jenkins had taken the night before. One of the men was Red Rupert. He did not like Red Rupert—a well-spoken fellow but

disconcerting, more alarming than the big fist of the man with the knife, though the man with the knife was bad enough. The man with the knife was not quite right in his head—so Red Rupert had hinted—and liked sawing people's thumbs off. That was a pretty sort of amusement.

Merril moved to the middle of the room. He must get out of this and lose no time about it. He was feeling a little better now, though his neck still hurt him abominably. It would be very stiff, he thought, on the morrow—always provided, of course, there was to be a morrow. It was no use thinking about the morrow in any case. That taximan he had found in Abbey Road—Goldenberg his name was—had made plans for the morrow, which was now to-day, and where was he now? On the slates, as the policeman would say—next door perhaps to slick Jim, who had probably helped to murder him. That was a grim thought. Merrill had a swift vision of the murdered man with his gaping throat turning on his slaty bed: "*You here too? Well, now you'll know what it's like.*"

The fellow with the red beard had said he disliked physical violence, but somehow the assurance was not convincing. It reminded him of something. Yes, of course. It was like the walrus in "Alice": "I weep for you," the Walrus said, "I deeply sympathize."

But he must really do something—pull himself together and not let his mind go wandering in this ridiculous manner. He was Merrill of the Foreign

Office, with lots of friends in London and things like this were just not allowed to happen.

He moved purposefully towards the door and tried it. It was locked, of course. Well, there was the skylight; but that, he saw at once, was miles out of reach, even if he stood on the bed. Was there any other way out? At first sight it did not seem probable. The walls were covered with a dirty paper of indeterminate pattern and seemed solid enough. He went round and tapped them, till he came opposite the alcove covered with the dingy curtain. He moved this aside. It concealed, as he thought, a few clothes—the rusty black outfit, in fact, complete with an apron of coarse sacking, of a housemaid. This, then, was the housemaid's bedroom. Merrill pushed the clothes aside, and then, stepping back, stared at the wall behind them, for in dislodging the long black skirt his hand had come in contact with a brass knob. He took down the clothes from their pegs and threw them on the bed. By Jove, the alcove was not an alcove at all. It was a door in a recess and it led to another room.

Very cautiously Merrill grasped the handle and turned it. It creaked with disuse, but the door opened. It opened about a foot, and then stuck. Merrill pushed and there was a screech as of some piece of furniture being propelled with difficulty across the floor. Merrill looked through the gap he had made. That was it. There was a bed on the other side of the door. Merrill pushed again and the bed moved another foot from the wall.

He enlarged the opening until he could slip through. He found himself in a room very similar to the one he had left, but he gave it scarcely a thought. He walked softly across the uncarpeted floor and tried the door leading to the corridor. It swung open at a touch. By Jove, his luck was really in at last. He crept out into the corridor. Everything was quiet. He stole down to the end of it and leaned over the well of the stairs, to ascertain whether there was sound or sight of any one.

Everything was very still. The hum of the London traffic came very faintly to his ears, muffled by distance and the walls of the house. Should he risk it? Creep downstairs till he got to the hall, and then make a bolt for it?

Stealthily he took a step forward and began slowly to descend the stairs. But just below him a door banged. That was the floor on which the room where he had had his interview with Levinson was situated.

Merril drew back hastily. He might walk straight into Red Rupert if he were not careful.

Suddenly an idea entered his head. He stood for a moment at the top of the stairs, thinking it over. Yes, he would do it. It might make all the difference between success and disaster. It was a slim chance, but a chance just the same. It might afford him just those few seconds which would enable him to pass the danger zone in safety and get away into the street.

He returned to the room in which he had been confined. Then he picked up the clothes which he had thrust on the bed and examined them quickly. They were made for a woman much larger than he, but that was soon remedied. He seized the frowsy pillow from the bed, and, unbuttoning his waistcoat and the top of his trousers, thrust it inside. Then with difficulty he buttoned his coat over it. Over all this he pulled the blouse which had once been white. Next came the black faded skirt. Fastened over the pillow it held up sufficiently well, though it was long—a fact for which Merrill thanked his stars, for it hid his boots and socks. His trousers he concealed by turning them well up.

There was a disreputable-looking hat on a peg behind the door. He thrust it on his head. It was a widow's affair with a long crêpe veil, which he draped carefully round his throat.

The apron he firmly rejected. Housemaids did not go for an afternoon outing in their aprons. He wished he had a pair of gloves. It would look better if he could carry gloves. Men's hands were always so large. Still there was an umbrella, which was better than nothing. He caught up the old gamp propped in the corner of the room, and then, after trying unsuccessfully to see himself in the cracked mirror on the washstand, he squeezed through the door and so out into the passage.

The dust, he noticed, on the uncarpeted floor was very thick, and, bending down, he picked up some of it and smeared it discreetly upon his forehead

and face generally. Not a very good make-up, but it would have to do.

"God bless you, Emily," he said, as he made for the bedroom door.

Starting too eagerly downstairs, he nearly took the whole first floor in one, for he trod on Emily's skirt, and only just saved himself by a sudden clutch at the banisters. After that he went more cautiously and negotiated the first flight in safety. Very softly he moved down the corridor towards the fatal room. He was abreast of it now. The door was shut and a murmur of voices came from behind it. Now he was safely past and at the head of the lower flight.

Suddenly he heard the door behind him open. With a superhuman effort he controlled himself and neither turned his head nor increased his pace. The voice of Red Rupert, smooth and deadly, came to his ears.

"Yes, my dear Levinson," he was saying, "It's only the housemaid going for her afternoon out."

Merril continued on his way. He was suffocatingly hot. His skin was pricking all over. Thank heaven, here was the ground floor at last.

Through the aqueous gloom he made his way to the front door, pushed it open and stood in the bright glare of the street.

There was a taxi passing, and Merrill waved the housemaid's umbrella at it. The man drew up and leaned forward for the address.

"The Bath Club," Merrill was about to say, but

he saved himself in time. Emily was not a member of the Bath Club. He must think of something else.

Holding the crêpe veil to his face, he told the man to take him to his aunt's house in St. John's Wood.

The man looked at him with a broad grin on his face.

"Visitors' entrance," he said.

"Drive to the back door," said Merrill shortly.

He entered the taxi which a moment later was speeding on its way.

CHAPTER X

THE SORROWS OF DMITRI

Dmitri Soubiroff, or Mr. Donald Sterling, as he preferred to call himself, come down the heavy oak staircase of Sham Castle into the hall below. Nobody was there. Nobody ever was. Even Jenkins would have been better than nothing. Or Goldenberg. But they were still away in London and for the last few days Dmitri had become extremely tired of his own company. Of all the many forms of boredom in this life he hated most of all to bore himself. And he was boring himself most unutterably at Sham Castle.

There was the doctor, of course. But he liked the doctor's company even less than his own. He could always take it out of Jenkins or Goldenberg. In fact, he was sometimes very bright and clever at their expense. But he could never take it out of the doctor. It was clear that the doctor did not think very much of Count Dmitri Soubiroff, and it was not very pleasant to be continually meeting a man for whom one was less than the dust, especially when there was no real justification for his really intolerable airs. After all, the doctor had very little reason to look down upon his partner.

"What has he done, I should like to know?" said Dmitri to himself suddenly, as he went downstairs. He had begun to talk to himself quite a lot during the last few days.

They had now been in Sham Castle for nearly a week, and things did not seem to be going at all well. The doctor, when he condescended to speak at all, evaded saying anything definite. It was necessary to be patient. Rome was not built in a day, and all the rest of it.

"Why," said Dmitri to himself, as he strolled about the room, kicking a cushion for something better to do, "he won't even let me see Irma."

That was the limit. He had liked the look of Irma—a very pretty piece of goods, of his own race too. Blood was thicker than water, and they ought to get on very well together. It would do her good—it couldn't possibly do her any harm—to see some one who could talk to her properly and in her own language too. Of course, Irma was nothing much in herself—young and pretty, but no prettier or younger than scores of others he had known. Women in his life had always been plentiful and always would be. He had a way with him, as far as women were concerned. But Irma was more than another flower by the wayside . . . Money, and all that money could buy . . . By Jove, if only they could bring it off.

Dmitri kicked the cushion to the top of the tall bureau beside the window and paused on the thought

of what Irma might mean to them all. His face flushed.

"We're going to bring it off," he said aloud. "Then it will be 'all beer and skittles,' as the English say."

Meanwhile this was about as bad as it could be. He looked round the hall with a growing distaste. This was the only room on the ground floor that was used, for the gaunt dining room, the drawing-room and the billiard room were stacked with moth-eaten furniture and were shrouded in dust sheets. This hall was really a hideous place. Comfortable, yes, quite comfortable—a good leather sofa and leather armchairs. You could fit yourself into them and take your ease. But heavens! how ugly they were.

Then there was that awful creature in the kitchen—always having "misfortunes," as she called them. The amount of crockery she smashed was appalling, and they were now reduced to eating off clumsy white plates, half an inch thick. They reminded him of the awful cheap restaurants to which he had been reduced during the worst years of his exile in Paris—*prix fix 5 f. vin compris*. But the plates were a minor grievance compared with what was served upon them. Good plain cooking, the doctor called it, and it was certainly plain—underdone beef, alternating with underdone mutton, with potatoes cooked in their jackets.

And yesterday Mrs. Murdoch had had a misfortune with his best trousers which he had given her

to press, and had burnt a hole in them with the iron. That was really beyond anything—especially as he had only that morning received a letter from his London tailor intimating respectfully but firmly that a small sum on account would oblige. He had heard that it was the English practice when tailors pressed for something on account to pacify them with an order for more clothes. That was supposed to keep them quiet for a bit. He hoped it was true, but one never knew when these English were pulling your leg. Englishmen always complained of being hard up and the richer they were the more bitterly they complained. One would think that they all lived upon over-draughts, but in reality they were rolling . . . rolling.

Anyhow, he would send that order to his tailor—a morning coat for the wedding, a couple of suits and a new dinner jacket. That was a minimum.

The doctor was devilish close with the money. They had, of course, to be careful, but there were limits. Dmitri inspected gloomily the handful of silver which remained to him. It was really too bad—being kept on an allowance like a small boy. He couldn't buy a cigar without accounting for it to the doctor. Perhaps that was as well. He had bought half a dozen yesterday in Kirkbymoorside and the less said about it the better. But even if there was nothing to buy it was most provoking to be without any money in his pockets. It gave one an uncomfortably feeling of being really down and out. Just a few notes in the pocketbook made all the difference

in the world. It kept one cheerful and hoping for the best.

He poured himself out a whisky and soda and sipped it meditatively.

He must talk to the doctor about the money. How was it possible to keep one's spirits up with only seven and fivepence in one's pocket? High spirits were impossible on low funds and one needed confidently high spirits to live in a place like Sham Castle.

Dmitri looked at his watch; seven o'clock. They would be dining in an hour. The long summer day was drawing to its close. How quiet it was on the moor, miles from anywhere. There were no distractions in Yorkshire. There was nothing to shoot till the twelfth, and he understood from the doctor that there would be no shooting for *him* even then. Somebody or other had taken the shooting and was unlikely to invite the inhabitants of Sham Castle.

He stretched his long limbs and sipped at his glass.

Jenkins was coming back at last. That was a comfort, for it meant that another step had been successfully made in the right direction. Jenkins had not, it was true, been very explicit. He had simply said that he was coming back that evening. Not much of a message, but one could not say much in a telegram. Provided Jenkins turned up all right with the papers—nothing else mattered. Goldenberg could drop out altogether if he liked. There would be more for those who stayed in—particu-

larly for himself. In any case, he was going to have the lion's share. He would insist on that when it came to the point—a third of the booty, at least. After all, he would have to support the girl, and that would be an item—for he liked the woman to do him credit and that was devilish expensive—clothes, jewelry, and so forth.

There was a light step on the gravel outside the large Gothic window, and Dmitri interrupted his meditations.

"That you, Doctor?" he said.

Doctor Shorthouse entered quietly from the garden. He was dressed as usual in the striped trousers and the black coat, a perfect example of the modern practitioner.

"Confound the fellow," thought Dmitri, "why does he always dress like that? He looks as though he had just walked in from Harley Street."

"You haven't been out to-day, by any chance?" asked the doctor, as he came forward into the room.

"I have not," said Dmitri.

He closed his eyes and blew a smoke ring thoughtfully.

"Why do you ask?" he continued. "Can it be possible, Doctor, that you are beginning to take an interest in my amusements?"

"Not the faintest interest," said the doctor. "You are quite sure, I suppose, that you have not been out?" he added.

"Quite," said Dmitri.

"Strange," said the doctor.

"What do you mean by *strange*?" asked Dimitri.

"Nothing much," the doctor replied. "Only somebody's been walking about outside. There are footprints in the flowerbeds under the window."

Dimitri yawned.

"Footprints, did you say? Well, nobody's likely to do much damage in the garden," he said. "You could drill a platoon on the herbaceous border, and nobody would notice the difference."

"I should rather like to know to whom they belong," said the doctor; "the footprints, I mean."

"Perhaps it was Mrs. Murdoch's blackamoor," suggested Dimitri.

"I'm glad you feel like that about it," said the doctor. "You are apt at times to be too easily alarmed. Now, however, it pleases you to be flip-pant."

"I see no reason to be excited because there are footprints in the garden."

"Don't be a fool, Dimitri," said the doctor. "You know perfectly well that we don't want any strangers prying about here."

"Why strangers," said Dimitri.

"Whom can you suggest?" asked the doctor.

"How should I know?" said Dimitri irritably. "If it wasn't Mrs. Murdoch's blackamoor, it was probably Mrs. Murdoch herself."

"The footprints were large."

"So are Mrs. Murdoch's" replied Dimitri. "Very large indeed. And she wears men's boots, a pair of mine, if you want to know. And that reminds me,

Doctor. The old fool has burnt a hole in my evening trousers. It's too damnable. She left the iron on them or something, and now I can't change for dinner."

"Don't let it worry you," replied the doctor dryly. "Jenkins will excuse you."

The doctor sat down in one of the armchairs.

"That's not the point at all," grumbled Dmitri, pouring himself out another whisky and soda. "I always change for dinner."

"Then you'd better get yourself another pair of trousers," the doctor mildly suggested.

"I can't buy a pair of evening trousers in Kirby-moorside for seven and fivepence," Dmitri observed. "And my tailor wants something on account. In other words, Mr. Treasurer, I badly need a little money, and I don't at all see why you should be so damnably close-fisted."

"I'm sorry," said the doctor, "but you'll have to be patient, Dmitri. You know perfectly well that our financial troubles will come to an end very shortly."

"I don't know anything of the sort," objected Dmitri. "In fact, I know just about nothing at all. You're as close with your information as you are with your money."

He paused and flushed into sudden anger.

"I don't like it," he went on, "and I'm not going to stand it."

"What's the matter with you, Dmitri?"

"I don't like settling down in the middle of a

God-forsaken moor with seven and fivence in my pocket and nothing whatever to do."

"Anything else?" the doctor inquired.

"Lots," said Dmitri. "I should like to know what you're doing, for one thing—if you're doing anything at all."

"Finished?" said the doctor.

Dmitri leaned forward, red with anger.

"What's more, Doctor," he said, "I don't like your manner."

"I'm sorry," said the doctor.

"You're too damned superior, for one thing, though heaven only knows why you should be. You behave as though it were a strain to be even commonly civil. Try to be a little more chatty. This place is bad enough, without having to meet a man every half hour who looks down his nose at a fellow as though he didn't exist. You've no reason to think badly of your partners. We've done the devil of a lot of work—especially your humble servant. I got the girl away from Warsaw and dodged old Stolin half over Europe. Even Jenkins has done his bit, while you—what have you been doing, I should like to know?"

The doctor looked calmly at Dmitri.

"I found the money," he said.

"Five hundred pounds," said Dmitri contemptuously.

"Not a very large sum, I agree," replied the doctor. "That's why you've only got seven and fivence in your pocket. We can't afford to

waste a penny. But the money is a small matter."

"I suppose you think you're supplying the brains as well," said Dmitri sarcastically.

"That's exactly what I do think," said the doctor.

"And the rest of us, of course, are nowhere," said Dmitri. "I wonder you even allow us a share of the profits."

"Don't be a fool, Dmitri. We're all equally necessary to one another. I've never questioned that. You told us of Irma; you knew Stolin was getting her out of Russia, and showed us how to get hold of her, once she had crossed the frontier. Goldenberg supplied her with forged papers and helped you to get her away. Jenkins, if his wire means anything at all, has, also, as you say, done his bit."

"I'm glad you give us credit for something," said Dmitri.

"Not only that," said the doctor. "I give you credit for everything—so far as we've gone. But now you've pretty well finished—all of you; while I'm only just beginning. And let me tell you, Dmitri, that what's to come is not quite so simple as abducting a helpless girl or stealing papers from an empty house. Henceforth you'll have to rely on me."

Dmitri rose from his chair and walked moodily to the window. He surveyed for a moment the desolate garden and the empty moors beyond.

"Well, Doctor," he said, turning back into the room, "it's something to know that you're a starter.

But you're not in any danger of exceeding the speed limit at present, so far as I can make out from the bits of information you are good enough to give me now and then. Our progress appears to be exactly nil. Here we are and here we seem likely to remain."

"For the moment," Shorthouse agreed.

Dmitri, who was prowling about the room, paused and looked at the doctor.

"Heavens, man," he said, "anybody would think you *liked* it. Do you ever condescend to be human?"

"There is a time for all things," said the doctor. "If we bring off this plan of ours you can spend the rest of your life in being as human as you please. Meanwhile, however, you will remain at Sham Castle and take your orders from me. We haven't come here to amuse ourselves. The discomforts and boredom of Sham Castle are all part and parcel of the game, and they are nothing compared with what is at stake. You will have to be patient, Dmitri."

"That's all very well," said Dmitri, "but you might at least be a little more communicative."

"There is nothing to communicate, as yet," the doctor replied. "Irma is perhaps a little better than she was. But that's about all I can say. There are times when she seems about to remember things, at any rate sufficiently for our purposes. Then she relapses. As I said before, we shall have to be patient."

"Why don't you let me see the girl?"

"You will see a good deal of Irma later on," said the doctor, "and Irma will be seeing a good deal of you for the rest of her life."

"Poor girl," he might have added from the tone in which he spoke.

"I will let you know," he continued, "when I think it is safe for you to see her, and you must leave all that side of the business entirely in my hands. I'm doing my utmost and there must be no interference."

There was a pause. Dmitri yawned and lit another cigarette.

"Why on earth don't you mesmerize her straight away?" he grumbled. "I don't understand all this complicated mental stuff of yours."

"I could hypnotize her easily enough," said the doctor. "But it would be clear to anyone that she was not in her normal state of mind. I have got somehow to restore her memory and get her to accept my suggestions."

"Well, for the Lord's sake get a move on," said Dmitri. "This isn't a nursing home."

"It's not an easy job, you must admit," replied the doctor, quite unmoved by this outburst. "I've got to make her swallow a good deal, remember. She has got to accept you, for one thing, and I am trying to get that idea into her head. *'That is Dmitri,'* I suggest to her. *'That is Dmitri who loves you. Dmitri is a gentleman.'*"

He paused and then added dryly, "It's very difficult."

"I suppose, Doctor, you are trying to insult me," said Dmitri wearily.

"I venture to think, my dear Count, that I have succeeded," responded Shorthouse.

Dmitri looked at his watch.

"Half-past seven," he said. "Another half hour before dinner and damn little to do. And the dinner won't be fit to eat. If this goes on much longer, Doctor, you'll have another patient on your hands. Or else you'll find me hanging on the clothes peg in my bedroom one of these days."

"I don't think so," said the doctor quietly. "Life is still rather sweet, even in Sham Castle on seven and fivepence. You won't hang yourself, Dmitri. You haven't the pluck."

Dmitri flicked the ash from his cigarette.

"I'm not so sure," he muttered. "In any case, I advise you not to leave any of your poisons about. Nothing could be worse than a place where nothing happens."

There was a sound from the garden—a quick, running step and a man appeared suddenly at the window. He was breathing hard and the sweat was pouring from his face.

The men in the room turned and looked at him in amazement.

It was Jenkins!

He stumbled forward from the window.

"For Gawd's sake, Doctor," he gasped, and Dmitri saw that his hands were trembling, and that

he could scarcely stand, "I can't bear much more o' this."

He almost collapsed into a chair as he spoke.

"Shut the winder," he said in a voice that shook. "Shut the winder, one of you, and give me something to drink."

CHAPTER XI

THE BUST OF CAESAR

Shorthouse looked unsympathetically at the crumpled figure in the chair. He nodded to Dmitri who, interpreting the gesture, poured Jenkins out some whisky and, splashing a little soda into it, handed it to him. Jenkins took the glass and drained it at a gulp.

"Now, Jenkins," said Shorthouse curtly, "what does this mean?"

Jenkins gazed at him stupidly a moment, as though trying to grasp what was being said to him. His dull eyes wandered to the window.

"Shut it, Doctor," he said again. "It's not safe with the winder open."

"For heaven's sake, pull yourself together," Dmitri began. Shorthouse, silencing him with a gesture, crossed the room, closed the big window and drew a heavy curtain over it. Then he came back to Jenkins and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Jenkins," he said, "what's the matter with you?"

Jenkins had by now drained a second glass of whisky. A flush appeared on his face, but his hands still trembled and he could not quite control his voice.

"It's all up, Doctor. The whole blasted business—

finished. First one thing and then another. I've stood enough of it. I can't stand no more."

"You're not very lucid, Jenkins," said Dmitri.

"'Spose I ain't," said Jenkins, turning savagely on Dmitri. "You wouldn't be very loocid neither, if you'd been through what I've been through."

"Well, perhaps you'll tell us what you have been through," said Dmitri.

"One moment," said the doctor. "Give me the papers."

"Papers," said Jenkins stupidly. "What papers? Oh, yes . . . the papers, of course. I 'aven't got them, Doctor."

"What's that?" said the doctor sharply.

"Couldn't you find them?" said Dmitri.

"I found them, all right," said Jenkins.

"Then what have you done with them?" asked the Doctor.

"I've given them to a friend," said Jenkins "—leastways he's always been a friend to me."

"I met 'im in the garden," he added hastily, as he met the astonished gaze of the doctor.

"You gave them to a friend?" repeated Short-house.

"Don't look at me like that, Doctor," said Jenkins. "It was the best I could do, and I'd trust 'im with anything, I would. He's a real gentleman, not like you and me."

The doctor bent over Jenkins and his long thin fingers closed upon the man's shoulder.

"Come," he said peremptorily, "are you going to

tell us what has happened, or must we wait for Goldenberg?"

Jenkins laughed unpleasantly.

"Wait for Goldenberg?" he said. "You will have to wait a long time for Goldenberg."

"What do you mean?" said Dmitri nervously. "Has Goldenberg gone off somewhere?"

Jenkins, reaching out for the decanter, nodded his head.

"Where?" asked the doctor.

"To 'ell, I should think," replied Jenkins, "and he's probably got there by now."

"What on earth do you mean?" said Dmitri, turning pale.

"'E's dead, that's what I mean," said Jenkins, looking venomously at Dmitri. "That gives you a bit of a turn, don't it? You're feeling a little less perky now than you was. Not a nice thing to 'ear about, is it? And I as good as *seen* it, blast you. And you expects me to come up smiling. Throat cut from ear to ear, in his own blinking taxi, and me not ten yards away, 'ugging a blasted drainpipe like a blooming chimpanzee. And the fellow what done it was waiting for *me*."

"For heaven's sake, tell us what has happened," the doctor urged.

"I am telling you, aren't I?" protested Jenkins. "I 'aven't got the papers and Goldenberg is dead. That's something to go on with, but there's worse to come. We can do without Goldenberg, and the papers is safe. But it's all up, Doctor. It's what I

said. Just one thing after another, and only Gawd knows what will 'appen next."

"Good lord, man," said Dmitri, "you look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"I seen something a good deal worse than that," said Jenkins. "I seen Red Rupert."

There was a short silence, and Doctor Shorthouse breathed a sigh of relief.

"Thank you, Jenkins," he said. "At last we have it. You've seen Red Rupert. Is that all?"

"You wait," muttered Jenkins. "You just wait. You don't know yet what it means."

"Is Red Rupert the man who killed Goldenberg?" asked the doctor.

"Perhaps it was 'im that done it. But more likely it was one of his pals. Red Rupert don't often do the dirty work hisself. He prefers to stand by and say 'ow sorry 'e is when it's all over. But 'e was in the garden, all right. Waiting for me to come down that pipe, 'e was, and weepin' over the body, most like."

"I see," said the doctor. "Red Rupert is after the papers too."

"Yes, and he's after *me* now. He reckernized me, sure as fate, and now he'll be after me to the end of the chapter. Combinin' business with pleasure—that's 'ow he'd put it. 'Jenkins,' 'e says to me once, 'we shall meet again,' 'e says, 'and when we comes to that 'appy day, I shall attend to you personally,' 'e says. 'I shall carve you, Jenkins,' 'e says, 'like a dish fit for the gods. And that's Shakespeare,' 'e says."

"One thing at a time," said the doctor. "We sent you to London to get those papers. Will you kindly forget for a moment this old acquaintance of yours and tell us exactly what has happened."

Jenkins fidgeted in his chair. He looked uneasily at the doctor, who was gazing at him with a quiet, expectant authority. There seemed to be no escaping that steady influence. Gradually, under continual prompting, Jenkins told the story of his late adventure in the Abbey Road, his meeting with Merrill, his glimpse of Red Rupert in the Soho Café, and his sudden decision to be rid of the papers at all costs.

The doctor paid no attention to his rambling fears, but brought him back calmly to the papers.

"This man Merrill whom you met in the garden of the house in Abbey Road," he said—"are you sure that he can be trusted to do as he was asked?"

"I'll answer for that," said Jenkins. "He was to bring them papers to York, and I was to meet him at the 'Long Man' this evening."

"Thank God," murmured Dmitri.

Jenkins looked round at him nervously.

"But I ain't going to meet him," he said quickly. "I ain't going to move out o' this 'ouse again, not till we all clear out together. See?"

"No," said Dmitri. "I don't see that at all."

The doctor considered Jenkins a moment, noting the obstinate, frightened look in the man's eyes. At last he spoke.

"Look here, Jenkins," he said. "We've got to have those papers, as you know, and I gather that this

friend of yours isn't likely to hand them over to any one but you. Why are you so set against going to York? I can understand that you're feeling a bit upset after what has happened."

"Upset!" the little man almost screamed in his excitement. "Haven't I been telling you? I seen Red Rupert."

"You saw Red Rupert in London. Have you any reason to believe that he followed you to York?"

"I can't say that I 'ave. But you never knows with Red Rupert. Besides, as I said before, it's just one thing after another. I seen Red Rupert in London, but I've seen something else as well. You don't know Red Rupert. You don't care tuppence about 'im. But you won't be quite so 'appy when I've told you what I seen in the village pub not 'arf an hour ago."

Dmitri lit a cigarette, but his fingers were shaking. "Well, Jenkins," he said, "break it to us gently."

"I seen Stolin," said Jenkins.

"Good God," said Dmitri. With a nervous gesture he flung the lighted cigarette into the hearth.

The doctor did not move.

"Are you sure of this, Jenkins," he said.

"Of course, I'm sure. I never forgets faces. And I seen 'im as clear as I see you now. 'E was having a drop of 'what killed auntie' at the bar."

"And you were having a drop too, I suppose," said the doctor.

"Well, what of it," protested Jenkins. "Hadn't I been pedaling uphill for the best part of an hour.

Nice way to treat a feller. All you leaves me was a blasted little jigger with a dicky back tire to get to here from Kirbymoorside. All up them blasted hills. I was thirsty—if you want to know, and I got off at the pub. I goes into the pub and the first thing I sees in the taproom was Stolin. I seen him like I sees Dmitri here. Just as plain and just as ugly.”

“Did he see you?”

“I didn’t wait to ask ’im. I jist turned round and, before you could say Jack Robinson, I was on that there jigger and pedaling down the road. You see, I wasn’t feeling particularly sociable. *Good evening, Mr. Stolin; fancy meeting you.* I don’t think.”

“Was he alone?”

“There was nobody along of ’im in the pub.”

“Well,” said the doctor, “I’m not surprised.”

He turned to Dmitri. “Those must have been his footmarks under the window,” he said.

“Well,” said Dmitri. “What are we going to do?”

He began to walk nervously about the room.

“I was afraid this would happen,” he continued.

“It was always a contingency,” said the doctor coolly. “Stolin has tracked us—that’s all. Stolin is an expert, remember, while you, my dear Dmitri, are only an amateur. Stolin is here on the spot and we shall have to deal with him, if I’m not mistaken. Meanwhile, I should like to get this other business of Red Rupert a little clearer.”

He turned abruptly to Jenkins.

“You saw him, you say, in the Abbey Road?” he asked.

"I didn't see him there myself. It was my friend Merril that seen him."

"Your friend Merril, then. You say Red Rupert had several men with him."

Jenkins nodded.

"Tell me, now, who is this Red Rupert? What do you know about him? Pull yourself together and tell us. I want to know how he comes to be mixed up in this business."

"Perhaps he's only after Jenkins," said Dmitri hopefully.

"Wouldn't you like to believe it?" retorted Jenkins, flushing an angry red.

"It would certainly simplify matters," said Dmitri, lighting a cigarette. In the presence of such abject fear as that displayed by Jenkins, he was beginning to take heart again.

"I don't think he can be only after Jenkins," said the doctor. "Jenkins has told us he was lately in Russia. It's more than likely that he knows of Irma's escape and that he's taking an interest in her future. Jenkins is probably a side issue."

"Well, Jenkins," said Dmitri, "is there any special reason why Red Rupert should devote himself entirely to you? And perhaps you would also explain why Red Rupert should be any worse than the other crooks you have met with in your checkered career?"

"Because he is, I tell you," snapped Jenkins.

The little man seemed on the verge of tears.

"You'll find out what sort of man Red Rupert is soon enough, if you gives him a chance. You don't

know Red Rupert like what I do. 'E's been out to get me ever since the armistice."

He paused, and added more to himself than to the others:

"It wasn't my fault Florrie preferred me to 'im, was it?"

"We don't want to hear about your amours, Jenkins," said Dmitri.

But Jenkins was too far gone to respond to the familiar goading of his partner. He hardly seemed to hear what was being said, but sat as though looking at some interior vision of the man by whom he was obsessed.

"He was always merciless," he went on. "Merciless, and laughing, laughing like a ninny all the time. 'E's 'alf a foreigner, you know, and I believe 'e worked for foreign governments during the war. And that's what made 'im so cruel and artful."

"A spy, in fact," said Shorthouse.

"Spy, and crook, and *murderer*," said Jenkins, warming to his subject. "There wasn't no use for 'is spying after the war—so 'e went to Russia and since then—the things 'e's done. Well, I won't tell you. I don't want to upset your nerve."

"Have you any reason to believe that he's on the track of Irma Brezhoff," asked the doctor.

"Yes, I 'ave," said Jenkins.

"Why do you think so?" the doctor insisted.

"'Cos I do," said Jenkins. "Red Rupert is a man what attends to his business. 'E's after *me*, of course. But that's only what 'e would call a bit o' sport—

Saturday to Monday, as you might say. Don't you make no mistake, Doctor. 'E's after the lot of us, and we're all in the same boat. It's sink or swim together."

There was a short silence. The doctor put his hand on Jenkins' shoulder.

"Jenkins," he said, "you'd better get something to eat. You will find some cold meat and cheese on the kitchen table."

Jenkins rose from his chair and stood hesitating a moment.

"Hurry up, Jenkins," said Dmitri sharply. "The train for York leaves Kirbymoorside at 8.15. You've no time to lose if you're going to meet this friend of yours at the 'Long Man.'"

"I ain't going to catch no train to York," said Jenkins, turning on him suddenly. His air was that of a weak man at bay. "Papers or no papers, I ain't going to leave this 'ouse to-night. And when I leaves it, I leaves it for good—see?"

Dmitri started to speak, but the doctor silenced him with a quick gesture.

"Do as I suggest," said the doctor. "Get your supper and then I think you'd better turn in and get some sleep. I will give you some bromide."

"Bromide," muttered Jenkins, as he turned to the kitchen door. "Bromide, indeed. A dose of three-star monkey gland would have no more effect on me at this moment nor a glass of water."

Dmitri turned to the doctor as the door closed behind Jenkins.

"Look here, Doctor," he said, "this is absurd. You must insist that Jenkins goes for the papers. We can't get them ourselves. We're not likely to recognize this man Merrill, and even supposing we did, he's not likely to give the papers up to a stranger."

"I know all that," said the doctor impatiently.

"Then why don't you insist?"

"Because Jenkins happens to be right," said the doctor coolly. "We've got to realize that henceforth this house is watched. It's certainly watched by Stolin, and for all we know by Red Rupert and his gang. Jenkins would very probably be assaulted and robbed on his way back. Luckily we've got somebody to help us who can go and come as he pleases. No one would dream of stopping *him*."

"Who do you mean?"

"The village postman," said the doctor. "I propose to get through to the 'Long Man' on the telephone and ask this fellow Merrill to post the papers to us here."

"Merril may not be there."

"Then he will get my message when he arrives."

He crossed to the telephone.

"You'd better join Jenkins and have your supper too. Mrs. Murdoch likes us to be punctual for meals."

Dmitri started to retort but thought better of it and left the room, peevishly banging the door behind him. The doctor, telephone in hand, looked after him with lifted eyebrows and a slight smile on his thin lips.

He put through a trunk call to York, and, as he was waiting for the bell to ring, he walked up and down, humming an air from the "Rosenkavalier" below his breath. He appeared deep in thought. Once or twice he paused by the Gothic window and looked out into the garden. At last the telephone bell rang. He picked up the instrument.

Good. It was the "Long Man" all right and a gentleman of the name of Merrill had just arrived, inquiring for Mr. Jenkins. . . . Mr. Merrill would come to the telephone.

Merril was speaking now. Yes, he was a friend of Albert Jenkins, and he had taken charge of certain papers. He was to have met Jenkins at the "Long Man" but Jenkins had failed to appear.

The doctor began to explain.

"This is Doctor Shorthouse speaking . . . also a friend of Jenkins . . . his doctor for the moment . . . No, nothing serious, but he has had an accident. . . . Fell off a bicycle coming up from the station and sprained his ankle. . . . No, he can't possibly come to York to-night. . . . No, of course not. . . . You can't wait for him indefinitely, so would you mind posting the papers to him here. . . . Yes, he will get them in the morning. . . . Yes, I'll give you the address: Albert Jenkins, care of Doctor Shorthouse, Sham Castle. . . . What's that you say? . . . Yes . . . Sham Castle . . . It is rather an odd name, isn't it? . . . Sham Castle, near Kirbymoorside. . . . Thank you. Good-by."

He hung up the receiver and, making his way to the kitchen, joined the others at supper.

Jenkins refused the promised dose of bromide. He was going to sleep with one eye open if it were possible to sleep at all. The doctor accordingly left him to his own devices and, taking Dmitri back to the hall, reviewed the situation once again in the light of what Jenkins had told them.

"There are two problems," said the doctor. "There's Stolin, and there's Rupert Ahrens. Ahrens may still be in London, but Stolin, as we know, is here, and I should say that he is keeping a pretty close watch on our proceedings."

Dmitri looked nervously towards the Gothic window.

"Yes," said the doctor, following his glance. "He's probably out there—and not very far away. Let us assume that he is. It may simplify matters."

Dmitri looked sourly at the doctor.

"It will certainly simplify matters if he catches sight of Irma," he said.

"That," said the doctor coolly, "is exactly what I intend him to do."

Dmitri stared at the doctor incredulously.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I am going to assume that Stolin is watching this room and we are going to show him something."

"You must be mad," said Dmitri.

"Then you will please to humor me," said the doctor. "Pull down that linen blind in front of the window, please, and then—"

He paused a moment, and his gaze went round the room as if he were looking for something.

"Yes," he continued, "Julius Caesar will do. You might take his bust from the bureau and place it on that small table over there. Drape my dressing gown around it. The likeness is not so bad—rather striking, in fact. When you have done that, turn out all the lights in the room except the tall standard in the corner."

He turned to leave the room, as he finished speaking.

"One moment, Doctor," Dmitri protested. "What's the idea?"

"I'm going to get Irma," said the doctor.

He turned and, climbing the staircase, disappeared from view. Dmitri looked after him doubtfully for a moment, and then began to follow his instructions. It took him some little time to drape the doctor's dressing gown, which was of green and gold, round the bust of Caesar to his satisfaction. He then drew down the linen blind, pulled back the curtain and turned out the lights. As he did so he heard a rustle of drapery on the stairs. Irma was coming down with the doctor behind her. He was wearing an opera cloak, lined with violet silk which looked somewhat incongruous over his formal clothes.

Dmitri looked eagerly at Irma. She was walking curiously, looking straight in front of her. The strangeness of her carriage intimidated him, but he was glad to realize so completely that his memory had not played him false. There was no doubt of it. Irma

Brezhoff was a girl in a thousand, really a most attractive creature. Her hair was cut like that of a mediæval page; she wore her blue silk dressing gown over pyjamas, and her small feet in blue satin slippers, with pompons on them.

He made a movement towards her, but the doctor instantly beckoned him aside, and Irma, still looking straight in front of her, passed down the staircase.

"Irma," said the doctor, in a curiously toneless voice, "Go and sit in that chair by the window."

"He has hypnotized her, put her right under this time," thought Dmitri. "What on earth is he going to do?"

Irma walked to the chair and sat down almost before the doctor had finished speaking. Her face was pale, but she breathed easily. She might have been asleep except that her eyes were open.

Dmitri now realized the doctor's intention. Irma in the window, with the light behind her, was to be a decoy for Stolin.

"What are you going to do?" he repeated nervously.

"We are going to wait," said the doctor.

"For Stolin?"

"Yes."

"And if he comes?"

"He will certainly come if he is out there, and when he comes—well, as I've reminded you already, Stolin is not immortal."

He drew the fold of his cloak aside a little as he

spoke, and Dmitri saw that he was grasping in his right hand a lean surgical knife.

The doctor pointed to the heavy folds of the curtain not far from the bust.

"Go and stand over there," he said. "I may possibly need your help."

Dmitri found himself walking as in a dream towards the curtain, while the doctor took up a similar position on the other side of the window, within two yards of Irma, motionless in her chair. So they all remained, waiting, as it seemed to Dmitri, for an interminable time. Thus they would remain for all eternity, like waxworks. Hours must have passed. He looked at the illuminated dial of his wrist watch. Less than ten minutes, but that was impossible. Time could not go as slowly as that.

Then suddenly his heart stood still and he held his breath. He had heard a slight sound at the window. Some one was pushing it open.

CHAPTER XII

THE FORTUNATE ENCOUNTER

"So he said his name was Shorthouse and that he lived in Sham Castle."

Merril looked at Granby over the glass of port which he had raised to his lips and nodded.

"Yes," he replied. "You can imagine that when he told me that—"

"The brain began to function," interrupted Granby. "In fact the gray matter began to splash about a bit."

"Well," admitted Merrill modestly, "I did begin to see the connection."

The '84 port, supplied by the hostelry of the "Three Tuns" in York, had done its work, and Merrill was oddly happy. It was difficult, in any case, to take a dismal view of life in the company of Granby. An hour or so ago he had been feeling far from cheerful. He had come to the "Three Tuns" to think things out and to recover, if possible, his wilting spirits. And there, to his delight, he had run into Granby, and in ten minutes things in general had begun to assume a brighter aspect.

The head waiter came to the table. Colonel Granby, it seemed, was wanted on the telephone.

Granby rose from his seat.

"I shan't be long," he said, "and I leave you in the best of company."

He looked with affection at the decanter as he spoke and walked lightly from the room.

Merril sat back more comfortably in his chair and raised the port to his lips. It was his third glass. He gazed with a sigh of satisfaction round the room with its wine-red wall paper and formal prints of the Sinnington hunt. This was a good ending to an uncommonly bad day. His mind went back over the previous twenty-four hours. That scene with his aunt had been distinctly trying. He had arrived in the borrowed plumes of Emily just as the real cook, discharged for good living, had been in process of departure, and she had taken him for her successor. The departing cook, a lady of enormous size and addicted to the consumption of porter, had not liked the look of Emily. There had been words, and the words of the cook had been distinctly better than his own. The driver of the taxi had quite audibly enjoyed the encounter, and the cook, to show that she was not unduly depressed by her departure, had thrust her head from the taxi, as it bore her away, and broke into song.

"Sell no more drink to my father,
It makes him so strange and so wild."

His aunt, of course, had requested an explanation, and she was not exactly mollified when he had lamely urged that he was doing it for a bet. She had pointed out that to wander round London dressed as a char-

woman, whatever might be the motive, was not the way to become an under secretary.

He had, however, pacified the old lady, and then he had made an unsuccessful effort to get Granby on the telephone. But that elusive man was nowhere to be found—neither at any of his clubs, nor at the War Office, nor even at Scotland Yard. He had accordingly had to content himself with writing an account of his adventures and sending it to the Club in St. James Square, where he had dined with Granby on the previous night.

And that had left him with barely enough time to catch the four o'clock train for York.

The journey had been uneventful, the carriage being occupied by two maiden ladies and a fair-haired clergyman who had entered rather hurriedly as the train was leaving King's Cross. He had done his best with the clergyman and they had discussed the revision of the Prayer Book.

At York Merrill had gone at once to the post office. It was a big office and it was clearing the mails for the north, and only after some time had he succeeded in obtaining the buff-colored envelope which he had posted to himself on the previous day.

It had then been necessary to keep his appointment with Jenkins, and from the post office he had gone without delay to the "Long Man." He had chartered a taxi, and the driver, on taking the address, had seemed surprised—a fact which Merrill had quite easily understood on reaching his destination. The "Long Man" had seen better days. Or perhaps

it never had. It was well outside the city wall, in a blind street that was blocked by a railway embankment where goods trains were performing endless evolutions after their kind. He had felt, at first, a little doubtful about approaching it, but at last he had pushed open the dingy saloon door and entered.

He had been met by the landlord, a living refutation of the superstition that men laugh and grow fat. He was certainly fat, but obviously he seldom laughed.

Merril had ordered a glass of gin and water. Then he had leaned across the counter and inquired for Jenkins.

The fat landlord had looked at him suspiciously with his piggy eyes and on Merrill repeating the name, had said something about not having seen Mr. Jenkins of late. Then the telephone behind the bar had rung and Merrill had received a surprise. For the landlord, taking down the receiver and listening for a moment to what was being said, had turned to him suddenly.

"Is thy name Merrill?" he had asked, and on being told that it was, he had added: "Then thou art wanted on the 'phone."

There and then, passing behind the counter, Merrill had picked up the receiver. He had found himself listening to a polite and friendly voice.

Mr. Jenkins, it seemed, had met with an accident and could not come to the "Long Man." Would Mr. Merrill post the papers to Mr. Jenkins instead of

waiting for him at York? Then had come the address—care of Doctor Shorthouse, at Sham Castle.

He had almost dropped the receiver at that; for his mind had gone swiftly to his talk with Granby in London and the mysterious packet of cigarettes. Happily, however, he had recovered his wits sufficiently to answer the telephone correctly.

Sham Castle—that was the place for which Granby had been looking; and it seemed that Jenkins was there and a man called Shorthouse, and that they wanted the papers which had been taken from the house in the Abbey Road. The plot had thickened, with a vengeance.

Merril had made his way rapidly from the public house, too, rapidly, in fact, for the landlord, promptly running after him, had reminded him that there was a small matter of gin and water which he had omitted to settle. Thence he had been driven in his taxi straight to the "Three Tuns," and there, just as he was sitting down to a late dinner, a hand had smitten him a devastating blow between the shoulders, whereupon he had swung round to find himself face to face with Colonel Granby. And Colonel Granby had ordered a bottle of the '84 port.

Merril raised his glass to the light. It was a good wine, and here was Colonel Granby coming back from the telephone. Colonel Granby was a good fellow. He knew how to eat and drink, for one thing, and the landlord of the "Three Tuns" respected him. This was a fortunate encounter—and not altogether due to chance. For the Colonel had also discovered

that there was a Sham Castle near Kirbymoorside, and he had come to find out whether it was the place with which his friend Stolin had been so mysteriously concerned.

"Well, young fellow," said Granby, as he resumed his seat. "I suggest that you take up the thread of your story from the point at which you began to be incoherent. You had just received about fifteen hundredweight of potatoes on the back of the neck in Covent Garden. Forrard on from there, if you don't mind, and please to cut it short. We have no time to lose. There is going to be work for us both to-night, unless I'm mistaken."

Merril went rapidly through his morning's adventures. Again he was running after Slick Jim towards Oxford Street, saw the body beside the wheel of the motor bus, accompanied it to the station in Bow Street, was conducted unsuspectingly to the upper chamber in Gonzago's Hotel, was bullied by Levinson and had his first encounter with Red Rupert.

Flushed with wine and the progress of the epic tale, he told proudly of his escape.

"All you have to do in a position like that is to keep cool and damn the consequences," he said.

"Consequences," he repeated carefully, and then with the air of one who had not done so badly in a crisis, he lifted his glass.

"It was dead easy," he concluded.

"It was," said Granby dryly.

Something in his tone caused Merrill to set down his glass on the table.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that people don't usually escape from Red Rupert as easily as that."

Granby was looking at Merrill now with an odd smile which somehow caused Merrill to be less pleased with himself.

"Isn't that rather a compliment to me?" he stammered.

"Think again," said Granby.

Merril thought. In a mist of red wine he saw again the recess with Emily's clothes upon the nail, the door into the other room and the door thence into the corridor—both unlocked. No. Red Rupert could not be quite such a fool as that.

His face fell and Granby chuckled.

"Sorry, old man," said Granby. "I see you've got it now. You escaped from Red Rupert because he wanted you to do so."

Merril stared across the table.

"But why on earth should he do that?" he murmured.

"That's an easy one," said Granby. "He wanted to know exactly what you were doing and he did not think that Soly was likely to find out. You might, of course, have told him eventually. But you might equally have been merely obstinate or have lied to him ingeniously. So Red Rupert thought it a better plan to let you escape and to find out what you were doing for himself."

"You mean that he is having me watched?"

Granby nodded.

"I haven't noticed anything," Merrill protested.

"You're only a beginner, young fellow. You only notice what is put before you. Emily's wardrobe, for example. You may be quite sure that you've been followed to York and that Red Rupert means to make it a dead heat at Sham Castle. On with the tale."

Merril concluded his story, telling, among other things, of his unsuccessful efforts to find Granby in London.

"I started in my car for York this morning," Granby explained.

Merril stretched his hand for the decanter. Abstractedly, for he was now in meditation, Granby moved it out of reach.

"Good lord," thought Merrill, "he thinks I've had too much."

That, of course, was absurd. He did not protest, however. Something in the cold blue eyes and the drawn face deterred him. Granby was thinking, and it was perhaps as well to allow that process to continue undisturbed.

Suddenly Granby spoke.

"You have got those papers, of course," he said, and at the same time he stretched out his hand across the table.

"Here they are" said Merrill, and, with the utmost docility, he put his hand into his coat pocket and pulled out the buff-colored envelope.

"Good lad," said Granby, as he slit it open. "It was quite a bright idea of yours, by the way, to post

them to yourself in York. I might have thought of that myself. But why on earth didn't you take a look at them? You have in your possession papers for which murder and robbery have been done, and you haven't even the curiosity to find out what they are."

He pulled out the contents of the envelope as he spoke.

"They don't belong to me," said Merrill.

"Nor do they belong to Jenkins," retorted Granby. "It's our business to restore them to their rightful owner and how are we to find out who that may be unless we look at them?"

He unfolded several papers which the envelope had contained and looked through the papers in silence. Then he handed them to Merrill.

"What do you make of them?" he asked.

Merrill picked up the papers and examined them carefully. There were three of them altogether, and, as he laid the last of them down, his hand trembled. A suspicion had entered his mind, a suspicion that was almost a certainty.

"Good God," he stammered.

"Yes," said Granby, "pretty obvious, isn't it? It's abduction and the stakes are high. This fellow Shorthouse appears to be first in the field, but Red Rupert clearly intends to be in at the death. Then there is Stolin. How does he come to be mixed up in it too?"

He put his hand in his pocket as he spoke and produced the packet of Three Castle cigarettes, now

rather the worse for wear. He looked at the packet reflectively for a moment. Then suddenly he chuckled, and pointed a lean finger at the third castle, the only one which was not obliterated.

"Look," he said, and Merrill looked in vain.

"Well?" said Merrill.

"Don't you see," said Granby. "The third castle is not crossed out like the other ones. It's only shortened—short castle, Shorthouse. Beware of Shorthouse, who lives in Sham Castle near Kirbymoorside."

"It's rather far-fetched," said Merrill dubiously.

"Nothing succeeds like success," said Granby. "It's led me to Sham Castle. I've found a Doctor Shorthouse, and I am warned that he is dangerous. Hats off to Stolin."

"The doctor seemed quite a decent fellow," protested Merrill, "on the telephone, I mean—well-spoken and all that sort of thing."

"The whitest shirt may hide a wicked earl," retorted Granby.

"Now, young fellow," he continued, "we shall have to go carefully, but it oughtn't to be a very difficult business. I've warned the local police."

"When did you do that?" asked Merrill.

"Just now," replied Granby, "when I went to the telephone."

"Why not take the police to Sham Castle at once?" asked Merrill.

"I see," said Granby; "march up to Sham Castle, form fours, blow the bugle, sound the fife and all

that sort of thing, to be met by a well-spoken doctor of medicine in charge perhaps, of a young lady and of poor little Jenkins with a damaged ankle. And no Red Rupert at all. No, young fellow. I'm out for bigger game than Shorthouse. Shorthouse is only a makeweight; I'm after Rupert Ahrens and I'm going to get him this time. Sooner or later, and I think it will be sooner. He will come to Sham Castle, and it would probably discourage him to meet a policeman at the door. Besides, I'm anxious to meet my friend, Stolin, who is 'gravely preoccupied with a young lady.' "

Granby laughed, his eyes shining with excitement.

"By Jove," he said, "it looks as though we should want a policeman at Sham Castle, after all, to regulate the traffic. There's me and you and Stolin and Red Rupert with Levinson in attendance, and the gentleman with a fancy for thumbs. There'll be an accident at the crossroads, if we are not careful."

"Those papers," began Merrill.

But Granby was already on his feet.

"Put them in your pocket," he said. "We'll drive to Kirbymoorside in my car, and you'd better take your bag, for heaven knows when we shall get back again. We shall probably want to take up our quarters a bit nearer to the scene of action."

Merrill thrust the papers into his pocket, and for the next five minutes was reduced to a speechless admiration of Granby in rapid action. In almost no time, as it seemed, they had called for the bill, paid it, distributed largesse and were well away from the

hotel, rushing through the cool air in the two-seater Vauxhall in which Granby had driven from London.

"And now," said Granby, as they passed the tall minster on the way to Kirbymoorside, "we've got to consider ways and means."

He accelerated from forty to forty-five as he spoke, in order to pass a closed car bowling quietly along well on the left side of the road.

"Our first job will be to spy out the land," he said. "A visit to Sham Castle, not necessarily by the front door, is indicated."

Merril, stimulated by the fresh air and thinking further of the papers he had just seen, had already reached the same conclusion. He had, however, decided to go himself, and the suspicion growing in his mind urged him to lose no time.

"I myself will go to Sham Castle," he announced.

Granby looked at him out of the corner of his eye.

"On what pretext?" he asked abruptly.

"I can say that I decided to bring the papers in person instead of posting them as Shorthouse suggested."

"I see. And then—"

"Well, I can just have a look round and ask a few questions, and if I find that there's anything wrong . . ."

"You'll say good evening and walk away with the papers in your pocket. And the doctor will see you to the door and wish you a pleasant journey. No,

young fellow, you must think of something better than that."

"I might just call and inquire after Jenkins. After all, he's a friend of mine."

"You're very anxious to get into Sham Castle, all of a sudden," said Granby. "Is it the port or just the youthful spirit of adventure?"

"I'm in this business now," said Merrill, doggedly, "and I'm going through with it. If you can find me a decent excuse to call on Shorthouse, well and good. If you can't, I shall go without, and trust to luck."

"Bolted, by George," said Granby. "Bit well between the teeth and nothing can stop him now."

Granby negotiated a double turn on the hillside and Merrill began to wonder whether he was still in the car and, if so, why.

"Listen to me, young man," continued Granby. "If you can visit Sham Castle without exciting suspicion, so much the better. Let us suppose that you call on Shorthouse. You tell him that you have posted the papers as per arrangement and that the doctor will be getting them by to-morrow morning's post, at about eight or nine o'clock. So far, all is well. You will then have to explain why, having posted the papers, you should have taken the trouble to drive forty God-forsaken miles in the dark to tell him so."

"I might be driving on to Newcastle, or something of that kind."

"So you just dropped in to put the doctor's mind at rest and to inquire after Jenkins. That would be

quite all right, if the doctor were just a guileless country practitioner. But he isn't anything of the sort. The doctor will be suspicious—very suspicious indeed."

The car went round a fierce bend, as it seemed to Merrill on two wheels only.

"I have it," shouted Granby. "The brain usually begins to work when I touch sixty-five. When we get to Sham Castle—"

"If we get to Sham Castle," thought Merrill.

But Granby was still speaking and his plan was so ingenious that his partner forgot the risks of the road. He nodded as Granby unfolded the tale that he was to tell to the doctor, and for the next few minutes continued to nod at intervals.

"By Jove, Colonel," he said, when Granby had finished. "That's simply splendid. It will remove the doctor's suspicions and it may tempt him to unbend a little on his own account."

"I wonder," said Granby, looking with some misgiving at his enthusiastic companion. "This doctor of yours must be a pretty wily customer. In fact, I don't know that I ought to let you go to Sham Castle at all."

He took a hand from the wheel and put it on Merrill's arm.

"You'll have to be careful, young fellow. Don't say any more than is strictly necessary, and come away as soon as you decently can. If you can get a word with Jenkins, so much the better. But I advise you to have as little to do with the doctor as possi-

ble. I've an idea that he's going to be pretty sinister. When you leave the house, come to the local inn where you left your chauffeur with the car. That, of course, will be me; and by that time I hope I shall have found my friend Stolin. He can't be very far away—always supposing that he is still gravely preoccupied with the young lady. Stolin, I expect, will be able to tell me everything, or pretty nearly everything. And then we shall know better what to do."

Granby had for the last mile been driving without his lights and, during this last speech, had been looking carefully about him. He now brought the car suddenly to a standstill, and Merrill saw that they had reached a crossroads on the moor—a lonely spot, with apparently no house within sight. In the angle of the moor, beneath a signpost that point to Whitby, he could just distinguish a little wooden box with the A.A. sign.

"As I thought," said Granby. "This is the A.A. telephone box which I noticed on the map. Sham Castle is over there—about two hundred yards to the left."

Merril looked dubiously in the direction indicated but could see nothing. The night was now very dark, for heavy clouds had moved slowly up from the west during their drive.

"I can't see a thing," said Merrill.

"You can't possibly miss it," said Granby. "I examined the map pretty carefully. There is a sort of hamlet with a small pub down in that hollow to

the right. That will be our rendezvous, about half a mile or so further on, down the road."

Without a word Merrill scrambled from the car.

"One moment," said Granby. "You mustn't take the papers."

"Here they are," said Merrill.

"Good luck," called Granby softly, and in another moment Merrill had vanished into the darkness.

Granby looked after him pensively.

"I wonder," he muttered, "whether I ought to have let him go?"

Softly he let in the clutch and ran the car down to the village. After all, the young fellow could not go very far wrong. He had a story which would give the doctor something to think about. Merrill had been through the war, and seemed a fairly bright lad, and chaps did learn a thing or two at the Foreign Office. Not much, of course, but still, a thing or two. Granby, nevertheless, was uneasy. This was going to be no laughing matter, especially if that man Ahrens was taking a hand.

There, at last, was the inn. Granby swerved across the road and drew up softly beside the door. It was past closing time and he had to knock up the landlord before he could get admittance.

The landlord was not hospitably inclined, but Granby knew how to deal with landlords and very soon, to the considerable surprise of that gentleman, a couple of rooms had been engaged and Granby was drinking a glass of beer with him and listening sympathetically to his grievances.

Custom, it seemed, was slack. No one ever stayed at the inn, not that the landlord minded that very much. So long as people drank when they were thirsty, or because they liked it, he did not give a hang where they slept. If they insisted on sleeping at the inn, he made the best of it. Happily they seldom did insist and could quite easily be discouraged. His only guest for the moment was a foreign gentleman, who had insisted on staying there for several days—a botanist or bug catcher, as it seemed, and not, as it happened, a very troublesome guest. Most of the time he was out on the moor, searching for butterflies. Quite a harmless person. Talked with a queer accent and went out a good deal after dark to look for a rare white moth with a foreign name. He had gone out, in fact, only half an hour or so ago.

Granby listened, mostly in silence, prompting the man now and then when he seemed about to run down.

At last he rose.

“Well,” he said, “I think I’ll go for a stroll before I turn in. Can you give me a key?”

The landlord nodded and produced a key from his pocket.

“Don’t wait up,” said Granby, “I may be longer than I expect.”

He moved to the door as he spoke, and, crossing the street, walked quickly along the road down which he had driven a short time before.

Merril must by this time have entered Sham Castle. How had he been received and had he been able to tell that story properly? He would probably have to

stand up to a pretty stiff heckling, and, if these fellows should catch him out in some small point, there would be the devil to pay. Granby's hand went instinctively to the automatic which reposed in his hip pocket.

There at last was the house, and by Jove it lived up to its name, with those absurd turrets and crenelations. And yet, despite its absurdity, there was something disconcerting about it. The moon had come out between two great clouds that were sailing across the sky, and the place was checkered with fantastic shadows.

He swung to his right and moved towards it slowly, noting, as he did so, that there was no light in any of the windows. Presently he found himself against a rough wooden palisade which separated the garden from the moor. He skirted it for some twenty yards till he found a gate, which he opened silently. A path, scarcely to be distinguished in the darkness from the unkept flowerbeds on either side, led towards the house, which was now quite close at hand. Granby moved from the path and walked lightly down the narrow strip of grass which bordered it.

He had taken about a dozen paces over the grass when he stumbled abruptly against something and almost fell. At his feet lay a dark object, heavy and and rather solid, but not hard. He stood still a moment in the darkness, looking down. He was now very close to the house, and, ten yards away, was a great Gothic window reaching to the ground, separated from where he stood only by a broad terrace.

First looking swiftly about him and listening intently for a moment, Granby bent down to ascertain what it was that lay upon the grass. His hands came in contact with a piece of cloth. It was as he had feared. This was a man that lay in front of him.

Granby took a sharp breath and stooped lower to investigate. Suppose it were Merrill? He could see nothing, and he dared not show a light.

At that moment, however, the moon sailed clear once more. The man was lying on his back, the face staring straight up into his own, the eyes fixed and glittering in the moonlight.

"Thank God," said Granby to himself. "It isn't Merrill." And then, with a start of dismay, he realized that he had given thanks too soon. For the face of the dead man, though it was not the face of Merrill, was one that he knew.

It was the face of his old friend, Vladimir Stolin, the man who had brought him to Sham Castle.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW

Merril moved forward into the darkness. The drive from York had cooled his wits and he saw his adventure now for what it was. Pretty sinister, as Granby would say. But that suspicion which had come so irresistibly into his mind when he had read the papers, now reposing in Granby's pocket, was more than enough to remove any misgiving he might otherwise have felt. He had realized at once that for him there could be no rest till he had put it to the test. He would have held to his purpose, no matter what Granby might have said to the contrary. Luckily, however, Granby had fallen in with his proposal. He was going to Sham Castle and, what was more, Granby had given him a fairly plausible pretext for the visit.

His suspicion was more urgent now, as he walked alone. Possibly it was groundless, but it had to be faced. It was a thing which had to be verified or destroyed as quickly as possible. Unconsciously he quickened his pace, but not for long, for he had to go carefully and, above all, to know where he was going.

He stood for a moment, looking vainly for the house. There was no light to be seen anywhere, but

there, on his left, was a shadow on the moor and, as he looked more closely, the dusky outline of a turret against the sky. He moved towards it.

So that was Sham Castle, an absurd erection and yet in the darkness unpleasantly suggestive of abnormal doings. He was in some sort of garden and would have to go carefully now. To his left was a window, and there at last was a light shining—a light and a shadow on the blind.

He moved from the path and, stepping lightly across the flowerbed, walked over the grass of an unkept lawn till he reached a stone terrace. From there he had a better view of the shadow. Or rather there were two of them, clean cut in silhouette upon the linen. One was of a man in some sort of dressing gown, with a lean profile, and a Roman nose. That, of course, might be Doctor Shorthouse. And if that were so, whose was the shadow on the other side?

Merril, his heart beating so fast that he held his hands to his breast, stared long at that delicate profile on the blind. There was something in the line of the throat, the chin being tilted upward, that held him there breathless, with a feeling of suffocation in his throat. Then, as in a dream, he thrust out a hand and touched the cool glass of the window. It yielded to his hand. It was not locked, and, if he were careful he would be able to slip into the room and stand between the window and the blind. With infinite care he stole forward and edged himself between the open leaves of the window.

The figures on the farther side of the blind did

not move, and, unable any longer to rest in ignorance, he looked round the corner.

Joyce Elliot. He had always known it would be thus. She was sitting in a chair, gazing slightly upwards, and her hands were folded in her lap. She wore some sort of dressing gown, shot with violet and blue, with lace at the neck and wrists. The tilt of her head was as he remembered it in the garden at Monte Carlo, when he had kissed her for the first time.

Yes, that was Joyce, but not, as he knew now, Miss Elliot, but Irma Brezhoff of the papers he had read an hour or so ago at the "Three Tuns." Abduction, Granby had said. . . . Merrill clenched his hands. What was he going to do? And what was she gazing at, with eyes wide open and yet so curiously fixed?

That was the other shadow he had seen on the blind. He had thought it might be Shorthouse, but Joyce, or Irma as he must call her now, was alone and that thing at which she was gazing was only a bust, a common plaster bust, the effigy of some emperor, Julius Caesar, or Heliogabalus or Caligula. It was standing on the table, fantastically draped in a green and gold dressing gown. What was she doing—looking at a thing like that?

He moved forward impulsively, but before he could speak there was a rustle at his side.

"What will I do with him, Doctor?" said a voice sharply in his ear.

Merrill paused. This was a nightmare. For Irma had not yet moved. She sat quiet as a stone, still gaz-

ing at the plaster cast. Then he became aware of a slim figure at his side, a man with a white face and shaking hands, and at the same time another voice, coming from the right, inquired:

"May I ask your name, sir?"

Merril turned his head sharply. A tall, lean man with a hook nose and two dark eyes close together stood looking him up and down. The man was dressed in a short black coat and striped trousers, with a white slip to his waistcoat. Over these formal clothes was draped an opera cloak of black and violet silk, secured round the throat by a silken cord.

Merril gazed at this figure in astonishment, rendered more acute by the curious room in which he found himself. He was aware of a great hall, shadowy and vast in the half-light thrown by a single electric lamp standing on a table near by. Vague horns and faces of beasts peered at him through the gloom. And there, only a few feet away from him, sat the girl he loved, Irma Brezhoff, gazing at a plaster bust.

"May I ask you to explain who you are?" repeated the tall thin man.

Merril pulled himself together. This must be Doctor Shorthouse. His brain went suddenly clear. The sight of Irma sitting under a strange spell braced his faculties. He must not arouse suspicion, and he had a tale to tell.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I think I must be right in assuming that this is Sham Castle."

"That is so," said the tall thin man.

"Then you, I take it, are Doctor Shorthouse?"

The tall thin man looked at him coldly.

"I am Doctor Shorthouse," he said, and waited for his visitor to continue.

"My name is Merrill. You rang me up early this evening and gave me a message about my friend Jenkins."

The slim man on his left with the white face and the weak eyes gave a quick sigh of relief and moved from beside Merrill.

"Please excuse me for one moment, Mr. Merrill," said the doctor.

He turned as he spoke to the girl in the chair.

"Go to your room, Miss Brezhoff," he said.

He spoke in quite an ordinary tone and the girl did not show any sign of fear or surprise, but rose mechanically from the chair and began to move towards the staircase.

Merrill saw her passing as in a nightmare. He must not speak to her or indicate that he knew who she was. That might be fatal for him and any chance he might have of rescuing her. But he could not let her pass away from him like that. She was apparently in a state of hypnosis, completely under the doctor's control. Would she recognize him? He continued to move forward quite naturally so that he stood in her path.

She did not turn aside, nor by any sign did she indicate that she even realized his presence. He stood now directly in her way. For a moment she paused, looked at him steadfastly, and then, swerving

slightly, walked deliberately past him. A moment later she was climbing the stairs, which ascended to a long gallery from a corner of the room. Then she disappeared.

Merril gazed after her involuntarily, and was only recalled to himself by the voice of the doctor.

"You know that young lady, Mr. Merrill?" he said.

Merril pulled himself together and turned to the doctor.

"No," he said with a creditable promptitude. "But for a moment she reminded me of someone I met some time ago when I was on a holiday. Apparently I was mistaken."

"She is one of my patients," said the doctor. "A mental case, as you probably noticed."

Merril blanched at the doctor's words, desperately hoping that neither of the men would see on his face any sign of the sickness at his heart.

"And now, Mr. Merrill," the doctor continued affably, "to what are we indebted for this visit?"

Merril glanced from the doctor to his companion. The latter, he noted, was dressed in a dark suit well cut and pressed, but a trifle shiny at the knees and elbows.

"I beg your pardon," said the doctor, following Merrill's glance at the stranger, "this is Count Dmitri Soubiroff, who is staying with me here."

The man thus presented came forward.

"It's too bad of you, Doctor," he said after he had bowed to Merrill. "My name is no longer Soubi-

roff," he went on to explain. "There are no more counts in Russia. I am now Mr. Donald Sterling, a naturalized British subject, at your service."

Merril also bowed. Then he turned back to the doctor.

"I must apologize for coming on you like this," he began. "You can hardly have been expecting a visitor at this time of night."

"We were not expecting *you!*" said the doctor easily, seating himself on the arm of a chair.

"I thought it best to come to you directly," Merrill continued.

Doctor Shorthouse bent forward eagerly.

"I see," he said, "you have brought us the papers instead of posting them."

"No," Merrill replied, "I posted the papers, all right. It was only afterwards that I began to think, all things considered, that it would perhaps be better to come and see you personally."

The doctor looked keenly at Merrill, and for a moment nobody spoke. The doctor waited, and Merrill felt it necessary to continue.

"May I sit down," he asked. "What I have to say is rather complicated and may take some little time."

"Why, of course, Mr. Merrill," said the doctor.

He moved forward a chair as he spoke. Merrill sat down, and produced his cigarette case.

"Allow me," said the doctor, proffering him a silver box. Merrill took a cigarette, lit it and leaned back in his chair.

"It's about my friend, Jenkins," he began. "By

the way," he interpolated, "I hope his accident was not at all serious."

He felt curiously at his ease, quite cool and calm, in fact, but in his heart was a cold fury. These men had abducted Irma and heaven only knew what they had meant to do with her. But they should not do it now. He choked down his anger and forced himself to be genial. After all, he had the whiphand of them. They could do nothing as long as he kept his head, and he was not going to give himself away. Too much was at stake. Besides, he knew exactly what he had to say. He had rehearsed it all with Granby.

But the doctor was speaking.

"Jenkins," he said, "is not badly hurt. But I advised him to go to bed."

"It is not, then, possible for me to see him?" responded Merrill.

"Is it necessary?" asked the doctor. "I don't think he ought to be disturbed."

"I take it that you are in Jenkins' confidence," Merrill continued.

"I believe so," said the doctor.

"The point is rather important," said Merrill. "I've come as the friend of Jenkins, to put him on his guard. You do not advise me to see Jenkins himself. But can I speak to you quite frankly? Do you know why he went to London recently and what happened last night, for example, in the Abbey Road?"

The doctor looked meditatively at Merrill. Meanwhile Dmitri had crossed the room and Merrill heard

the chink of a glass as he poured himself out a liberal dose of whisky.

"That man is in a blue funk," thought Merrill.

The doctor, however, seemed undisturbed.

"You may assume, Mr. Merrill," he was saying, "that I know what happened in the Abbey Road."

"Murder," said Merrill briefly.

"By some person or persons unknown," replied the doctor coolly.

"Exactly," Merrill continued. "But unfortunately Jenkins was there and his record apparently is not a good one."

"You also were there," observed the doctor.

"Luckily for Jenkins," Merrill observed. "I'm sorry to say that I met him in rather peculiar circumstances. But you know the facts."

"Well?" said the doctor. "Why have you come to see us in Sham Castle?"

"Jenkins, as you may know, is an old servant of mine. I am indebted to him for past services. I know he was not concerned in the murder of Goldenberg who was in fact, his confederate. I accordingly feel it my duty to warn him of certain developments."

"Continue," said the doctor.

"Goldenberg was left lying where he fell in the garden of the house in the Abbey Road. His body was discovered early this morning by the police, and I must warn you that there is already a warrant out against Jenkins."

There was silence in the room for a moment. Then the doctor leaned suddenly forward.

"How do you know this?" he asked.

"I am an official of the Foreign Office," said Merril. His voice was steady, though he knew that here the ground was not very sure. "I've friends in the C.I.D. and I made it my business this morning to find out what was happening. Needless to say, the authorities are for the moment ignorant of my part in the story."

"For what is Jenkins to be arrested? You know that he is innocent of murder."

Merril threw away his cigarette.

"The police," he said, "do not regard with favor witnesses of an atrocious crime who vanish mysteriously."

"Another cigarette, Mr. Merril," said the doctor.

"No, thank you," Merril replied.

"A whisky and soda, perhaps," the doctor continued. "Dmitri, a whisky and soda for Mr. Merril."

"This is very kind of you, Mr. Merril," the doctor went on, as Dimitri busied himself with the decanter and syphon. "Would it be impertinent for me to ask why you should have put yourself to all this trouble on our account? I imagined that young men at the Foreign Office were, above all, discreet. But you have put yourself within reach of the law, Mr. Merril. You are now, I believe, an accessory after the fact."

"I think I told you, Doctor. Jenkins rendered me a great service during the war. He saved my life, in fact. One does not forget a thing like that. I lost touch with him when we were demobilized and the

first time I saw him since that day was yesterday night. He asked for my help, and I could not refuse. I accordingly helped him by taking charge of certain papers and posting them to him here. On reflection, however, I could not bring myself to leave it at that. Jenkins is innocent, but his record, as I imagine, is far from healthy."

Dmitri brought the whisky to Merrill where he sat and offered it to him with a shaking hand.

"Very noble of you, Mr. Merrill," he said.

"Thank you," said Merrill. "But you will realize, of course, that my anxiety to save Jenkins from arrest is not altogether disinterested. As Doctor Shorthouse said a moment ago, young men at the Foreign Office are expected to be discreet. I have no wish to be publicly mixed up in this business, and if Jenkins is arrested, I don't quite see how that is to be avoided."

"I see," said the doctor. "Have you, perhaps, a suggestion to make as to how such a painful event is to be avoided?"

"Unfortunately not," said Merrill. "I have driven over from York in order to warn Jenkins. That is all I can do. I consider that my part in this affair is finished. Jenkins will receive his papers in the morning and nothing now remains for me to do but to wish you good evening and get back as quickly as possible to my hotel. This has been rather a fatiguing day, as you may imagine."

Merril drained his glass and set it down on the table beside him, with an assumption of unconcern

which he was far from feeling. The decisive moment had come. Did the doctor believe his story and would he be permitted to leave the house? Leave it he must, for Granby must be warned without delay of the discovery he had made—that Irma Brezhoff was Joyce Elliot, helpless and suffering from some malady that he did not understand. There must now be no instant of delay. The police must be summoned and Irma removed to a place of safety.

“You have your car,” said the doctor.

Merril nodded. He could not trust himself to speak at once. The relief was too great and his voice scarcely under control.

“I told my chauffeur to drive down to the village and get himself a drink. He has probably returned by now and will be up at the crossroads.”

“Very well,” said the doctor. “I’m sorry we can’t offer you a bed here, but the house is only half-furnished and we are extremely short-handed. Mr. Sterling shall see you to the crossroads.”

He came forward as Merrill rose and held out his hand.

“It is very kind of you to have come, Mr. Merrill. And you may be sure we shall do our best to get Jenkins away to a place of safety.”

Merril shook hands with the doctor and turned to Dmitri.

“Don’t trouble to come up to the crossroads, Mr. Sterling,” he said. “I can quite easily find the way.”

An expression of relief came over the face of Dmitri, but the doctor shook his head.

"My dear Mr. Merrill," he said; "that is the least we can do."

He looked, as he spoke, at Merrill with an odd, almost quizzical expression, and Merrill suddenly asked himself whether the doctor really believed his story or merely thought it policy to pretend that he did. He had no time to answer that question, however, for suddenly, from upstairs, came a sound that filled him with horror, the involuntary scream of a woman unexpectedly frightened. And before he could move from the spot, or think what this might mean, Irma appeared at the top of the stairs and came running blindly down to the room. Her eyes were wide with fright and her breath was coming quick and short. At the bottom of the staircase she turned and stumbled across the room towards the doctor.

She clutched him by the lapels of his fantastic cloak.

"Doctor," she said, "Doctor . . . there's a face . . . a face at my window."

CHAPTER XIV

THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA

Only the girl moved. She was holding the doctor by his coat and was shaking him slightly, as though she would make him realize the urgency of her terror. Then suddenly she swayed and would have fallen had not the doctor supported her and placed her in an armchair.

Merril had started instinctively forward, but the doctor prevented him with a gesture.

"There is nothing you can do here, Mr. Merrill," he said. "This lady is my patient, and something has frightened her. It is unlikely to be anything serious."

Over his shoulder to Dmitri he added quickly, "Run upstairs and see who it is. Be careful."

Dmitri took the stairs at a run, and Merrill noted that, as he turned the corner, he covertly produced an automatic from his pocket.

The doctor was bending over the girl once more.

"It's quite all right, Irma," he was saying persuasively. His voice was all on one note, rather low and quite even in its delivery.

"It's quite all right," he repeated. "You have been frightened, but now you are not afraid any more."

Irma gave a shuddering sigh and opened her eyes. She looked fixedly at Shorthouse.

"There was a man," she began, a little uncertainly, as though she were already less sure of what she had seen, "there was a man at my window, looking into my room . . . I heard something outside and drew back the curtain. And there . . . there he was."

A sound from the stairs caused Merrill to turn his head. Dmitri was coming down. He thrust his pistol hastily into his pocket as he caught sight of Merrill.

"There is no one there, Doctor," he said, "so far as I can see."

The doctor nodded and turned again to the girl.

"It was just a dream," he said in the same even tone as before. "There was nobody there at all. You are quite safe here with us. You know that, don't you?"

Irma was now lying quietly back in the chair.

"Quite safe," she murmured.

She raised her eyes slowly to meet those of the doctor and, in doing so, caught sight of Merrill, who was still standing in the middle of the room, following her every word and gesture. She clutched the doctor by the arm.

"Doctor," she said, "who is that gentleman?"

There was a curiously startled note in her voice. It was not fear, but a sort of suppressed excitement.

Merril took an impulsive step forward. The doctor looked sharply from one to the other, and then straight at Irma.

"This is only a gentleman who has come to bring me a message," he said.

Then, with a slight change of tone, and bending over her more closely, he added:

"But perhaps you have seen him before. Have you?"

The question was put with authority, but not harshly, as though the doctor were suggesting that perhaps here was something she ought to remember. Irma put her hand to her head.

There was a pause, and Merrill gazed at her eagerly. The doctor's designs and his immediate peril were forgotten. Only one thing mattered now—that Irma should recognize him, that she should break from this strange state of forgetfulness and look at him once again with the eyes that he knew. She was looking straight at him now, but the eyes were merely puzzled, and at last she shook her head.

"No," she answered slowly, "I have never seen him before."

The doctor was apparently satisfied. He raised himself to his full height and looked pointedly at Merrill.

"You were, I think, about to leave us, Mr. Merrill," he said. "I don't wish to seem inhospitable, but you have a long drive back to York. Mr. Sterling will see you to your car."

Merrill stood for a moment outwardly calm, but in an agony of indecision. The wise thing to do, the only thing that would enable him to get Irma away eventually, was to leave the house at once. For a mo-

ment, however, he could not take the decision. It was more than he could bear. He must leave Irma alone in that house, subject to the strange influence of the doctor, whose designs were still unknown. But he was unarmed. Irma did not know who he was. Even if by some wild act of rebellion he could have overcome the two men who were watching him now so intently, she might refuse to come away with him. He was a stranger.

This was not the Joyce he had known, but Irma Brezhoff, who did not remember him at all; who, as a result of some evil chance or the damnable influence of the man confronting him, was ill—desperately ill, and would have to be saved in spite of herself.

Suddenly he held out his hand to the doctor.

"Very well, Doctor," he said. "I will say good night."

"Good night, Mr. Merrill," replied Shorthouse. "I can only say again that I'm sorry to be sending you away like this. It was kind of you to warn us about Jenkins, and you may rely upon us to do everything we can for him."

Merril looked towards Irma. Again he hesitated.

"Your patient," he stammered. "Is there . . . is there anything I can do?"

The doctor laid a hand upon his arm.

"No, Mr. Merrill. That is entirely my affair. My patient is suffering from a slight loss of memory. Nothing serious," he continued, as he felt Merrill's arm go rigid under his grasp. "I have no doubt whatever of my ability to cure her, but it may take some

little time, and it is of course essential that she should not be exposed to any kind of shock or excitement."

Dmitri had moved to the other side of Merrill, who stood helplessly now between the two of them. Did they suspect him? Their attitude conveyed a suggestion that they divined his interest in Irma, though he had not yet given himself away, and they were both treating him quite easily and naturally.

He jerked his shoulders and moved to the window. Suspicion would change to certainty if he lingered. Better get straight away at once—find Granby and return as swiftly as possible with the necessary help.

They parted at the window, and Merrill was the first to step through. The doctor touched Dmitri on the arm as he was about to follow.

"See that young fellow well away," he said, in a low urgent tone. "Then get back here as soon as you can. Tap three times on the window."

Dmitri nodded and disappeared into the darkness. The doctor closed the window, and turning back to Irma, found that she had risen from her chair and was gazing in a puzzled, hesitating way after the men who had gone out.

He came towards her slowly.

"You are trying to remember him," he said, in the persuasive even tone he had used before. "You have seen that young man before."

It might have been a question that he asked or an assertion that he invited her to deny. She looked him in the eyes with a simple candor.

"Is it some one I ought to know?" she asked.

"It is somebody whom you should try, perhaps, to remember," answered the doctor quietly.

He took her by the arm and led her back to the chair.

"He reminds me of something . . . something," she continued.

A strange gleam came and went in the doctor's eyes. He sank upon his knees beside the chair and took her firmly by the hands.

"You knew him, perhaps," he suggested, "when you were in France . . . before you went back to Russia."

There was a pause. Irma kept her eyes steadily on the doctor's face. Presently she shook her head with a gesture of bewilderment and looked away. Then she began to speak as much to herself as to him.

"Perhaps it was before I went back," she said. "There was a white town by the sea, and a road that twisted among the rocks and at night the cars rushed past us with their headlights."

Then, with a sudden eagerness, she added quickly, as though following an invisible thread: "I was always telling him to be careful . . . Afterwards . . . he went away . . . He thought I was an English girl, because, you see, they called me Miss Elliot. My mother's name was Elliot. I remember that."

She ended suddenly. But the grip on her hands tightened.

"Yes," prompted Doctor Shorthouse.

And then with an almost savage abruptness he added:

"What was your father's name?"

She shrank swiftly away from him, as though a nerve had been touched. Then, recovering herself, she said mysteriously, almost in a whisper:

"Father said it was safer not to let people know who we were."

The doctor bent over her. His eyes were hard.

"But you are going to remember it now," he said. "Your real name is Irma . . . Irma . . ."

He prompted her as a teacher might prompt a pupil to remember a lesson imperfectly learned, and the girl repeated his words after him, like a child trying to pick up the cue and continue the recitation.

"Irma . . . Irma . . ." she echoed.

"Irma . . . Brezhoff," said the doctor, putting a harsh emphasis on the final word.

The girl shrank again, this time with terror, as though she were being forced right up against something she could never face.

"No," she said in sharp distress. "No. It isn't true."

"Your name is Irma Brezhoff," repeated the doctor implacably. "You remember it perfectly well. Your memory is all right, but you are refusing to let it work. You are refusing to remember, because when you went back to Russia, something happened. It was something terrible, and you do not want to remember anything that may bring it back to you. But that won't do, you know, because I am trying to cure

you, and you will never be well again unless you consent to remember who you are."

The girl, her body taut, was straining away from him into the far corner of the chair. But he would go all lengths to-night. He must thrust the facts home, force her back into the identity from which she shrank. He had tried persuasion and suggestion without avail; and the position was now becoming desperate. Always her memory turned and twisted to avoid the knowledge which hid beneath the threshold. He must bring it home . . . bring it home.

"You went back to Russia with your father, Irma Brezhoff," he continued.

The girl was trembling violently and had turned white to the lips.

"I didn't . . . I didn't . . ." she protested.

"You were both arrested by the OGPU, the secret police," he went on. "They put you in prison. . . . Then, one day, they took you both into a white-washed room. They said you would soon be free. You looked at your guards, with their rifles and bayonets. They smiled."

His grip tightened on her hands. He thrust his face forward within a few inches of her own.

"They smiled," he repeated, "and then you understood. They thrust your father against the wall . . . You saw them, with their bayonets drawn back . . . He cried out once as he fell . . . and the white wall was splashed crimson."

He paused and added:

"They had killed your father before your eyes."

Irma tore her hands from his grasp. A wave of color spread over her face. She seemed to be struggling with something within herself—something obscure that must be beaten back or it would overwhelm her. The doctor looked at her eagerly. She would admit it now. She would face the fact and all that he desired would follow. But her eyes went suddenly blank again, and the lines about her mouth set firm. Her face assumed an obstinate, impenetrable expression.

“I remember nothing,” she said.

The doctor, shaken by the effort he had made, rose from his knees and for a moment he fought savagely for self-control. He had failed. The obscure forces in the girl that kept her wilfully ignorant had beaten him. He must try again—the old, patient way of prompting and suggestion. He wanted to beat that blind expression from her face, but he must be gentle . . . gentle and persuasive.

“But you remember what happened before,” he said softly. “You remember the town by the sea.”

“I begin to remember it now, a little,” Irma admitted.

“And when you came back from Russia,” the doctor continued, still in the same gentle tone, “you remember what happened after that. . . . You were in England with your friends. They brought you to me, because I am a doctor and can cure you.”

Irma looked doubtfully round the room, as though trying to recall how she came to be there. Then she got slowly to her feet and moved a few paces away

from him. She began to speak, eagerly and hurriedly.

"I was very ill," she said, "and every one was very kind. Then I found myself here—with you. I . . . don't like this place," she went on, a note of childish terror creeping into her voice. "I want to go back to my friends. I think it is bad for me to be here."

Shorthouse approached her and put an arm across her shoulder.

"Listen to me," he said. "Your friends sent you to me here to be made well. Do you understand?"

Irma looked up at him confidently but with the puzzled expression of one trying to understand.

"Why do they never write to me, or come to see me?" she asked.

Shorthouse turned her gently round and put both hands on her shoulders.

"You shall see your friends again," he said, "as soon as you are well and as soon as you can do what is necessary."

The grip on her shoulders tightened.

"Your friends in London are very poor," he continued. "They lost all their money in Russia, and I am sure that, when you return to them, you will want to repay them for what they have done."

Irma looked at him in distress.

"How can I do that?" she said.

"Your father was a very rich man when he died," came the insistent voice of Doctor Shorthouse. "There is money for you in London. You have only to prove who you are. There is nothing," he went on,

his voice quickening a little, "nothing, do you understand, to prevent you coming to London with me to-morrow."

There was a moment's pause. Irma glanced round the room once more. Then she said, almost in a whisper:

"And you will not bring me back here?"

"There is no need for you ever to see this place again," he replied.

Again there was a pause.

"I do not understand about this money," Irma said at last. "It is really mine, as you say?"

"It is yours, waiting for you to claim it," returned the doctor.

"But my friends in London—why don't they do all this for me?"

The doctor had his answer ready.

"They cannot prove that you have a right to it," he said smoothly, "especially as you do not remember who you are. I will do it for you myself, as soon as you are well.

"Besides," he went on more softly than before, "there is Count Dmitri Soubiroff to be considered."

Irma, suddenly startled and alert, raised her head at this and looked at the doctor.

"Count Dmitri Soubiroff," she echoed. "He has nothing to do with me."

The doctor dropped again on his knees beside her, bringing his face on a level with her own.

"Listen," he said, and he spoke with a quiet

authority, "I am going to tell you something, and you must try to believe it."

He stretched out his lean hands as he spoke and laid them lightly on her forehead.

"You have got to believe it," he went on, "You are going to believe it. Your friends will not want to see you unless you can keep your promise to Dmitri."

"I . . . never made any . . . promise to Dmitri," said Irma, speaking with difficulty.

"Yes, you did," insisted the doctor. "You were to marry him in London. Your father wished it. You gave your word."

There was a long pause. He looked at her intently, waiting for the effect of his false suggestion.

Presently she sighed and closed her eyes.

"I never gave my word," she said at last. "Not to Dmitri. That is impossible."

The doctor rose abruptly from his knees, and, turning away from her, began to pace the room. He had been so near success. It was maddening, heartbreaking, but he could do no more that night. There was nothing for it now but to put her to sleep properly and get rid of her till the morrow. Mastering with difficulty his anger and disappointment, he walked softly back to where she was sitting in the chair, and, standing behind it, held his hands for a moment poised over her head.

"We will talk about this again to-morrow," he said, very gently and smoothly. "You will go quietly to sleep and in the morning you will remember what

I have been telling you. . . . Then we will go to London and arrange for everything to be done that is necessary. But to-night you will sleep . . . sleep . . . and remember."

He made a few slow passes perpendicularly from forehead to chin.

"Is that what I must do?" murmured Irma, a drowsy submission in her voice.

"Sleep," said the doctor, "sleep, and remember."

The girl's eyes closed and she began to breathe quietly and naturally. The doctor watched her a moment, then waved his hands rapidly in front of her eyes. She made no movement.

"Now," he said, in an ordinary casual tone of voice, "I am going to count up to five. When I say five, you will rise from your chair, go back to your room, lie down on your bed and sleep. One—two—three—four—five."

Irma rose obediently from the chair and, taking no further notice of him, moved to the staircase. When she was halfway up it, there came a sound of tapping on the window pane. She paid not the slightest heed to this, but continued on her way upstairs.

The doctor waited till she had disappeared. Then he moved to the window and opened it. Dmitri entered hurriedly.

The doctor pulled out a silk handkerchief and passed it over his forehead, which was damp with sweat. The effort he had made with the girl had cost him more than usual.

"All quiet?" inquired Dmitri, as he came into the room.

"Nothing further here," said the doctor, sitting down in the chair left vacant by Irma, "except that I have been working hard at the girl."

Dmitri crossed the room and sank into another chair at a convenient distance from the table on which was the whisky and glasses.

"Any result?" he asked, lighting a cigarette.

"Yes and no," replied the doctor. "Though the mischief is that, as she gets back her memory, she begins to get a will of her own. I had to send her right off at the end, which is never satisfactory, even when it succeeds. She will be all right for the night, I think, unless there are any further disturbances. By the way, have you seen anything of Jenkins?"

"I thought he had gone to bed," said Dmitri.

"I did my best to persuade him to do so, but he wouldn't hear of it. He's apparently made up his mind never to sleep again. The man's crazy with panic. First he talks of Stolin, then of Red Rupert, and half the time I don't know to which of them he is referring. He is now, I believe, in the summerhouse at the end of the sunk garden, sitting there with a pistol on his knee."

"Damn Jenkins," said Dmitri crossly. "What about Irma? She's much more important. It's a pity about this will of her own."

"Yes," said Shorthouse quietly. "She won't take you for love, Dmitri."

Dmitri helped himself to whisky, and laughed.

"I don't aspire as high as that, Doctor," he said, with a weak sneer.

"I am doing my best to persuade her that she has promised to marry you and that it was her father's wish."

Dmitri drank the whisky at a gulp.

"You just make her remember what is essential," he answered, "and leave the rest to me."

The doctor eyed him contemptuously. "You flatter yourself, Dmitri," he replied.

"I know something about women, Doctor," Dmitri said, refilling his glass. "In the good old days before the war . . ."

He smiled fatuously and drank again.

"I must get some new clothes," he added suddenly, setting down the glass.

The doctor laughed shortly.

"I'm afraid they will be wasted on Irma Brezhoff," he replied, "especially as she will have to pay for them."

But Dmitri, fuddled and correspondingly at ease, did not seem to hear.

"She is really rather attractive," he went on. "This marriage, in fact, will suit me very well, apart from the sordid advantages which I am to share with you and Albert Jenkins."

"I hope it is going to suit us all," said the doctor dryly.

There was a pause, and Dmitri lit a cigarette.

"By the way," went on Shorthouse casually, "I

have arranged that business about the will. Or rather I have done it myself. I think it best in the circumstances not to employ a lawyer. The meaning is clear, though the phraseology may not be perfect."

"You are making no end of a fuss about the will," said Dmitri. "Let's hope we shall not need it for many a long day. After all, Irma is very young."

He had mixed himself a third whisky, and he raised the glass to his lips.

"Are you suggesting," said the doctor dryly, "that perhaps the will is unnecessary?"

"I don't say that," replied Dmitri casually. "The girl may die, and then where should we be?"

"The girl, as you say, may die," the doctor observed still more dryly.

"But she will live, Doctor," said Dmitri, waving his glass uncertainly. "She . . . will live, and we shall all be happy ever after, like people in a fairy tale."

"That will depend a good deal on me, I think," replied the doctor in the same toneless voice.

Dmitri set down his now empty glass and stared at his companion.

"What are you suggesting now?" he asked. "I never quite know what's in your mind, and, what's more, I don't think I always want to know."

He reached again for the bottle as he spoke.

"I am merely suggesting," returned the doctor, "that you need be under no anxiety in regard to your future wife's health. It is understood that I am to be her medical attendant."

He rose as he spoke, and, moving across the room, opened an old bureau. It was a French piece of the First Empire, with a flat front which let down.

"I trust, for your sake," continued the doctor, leaning his elbow upon the bureau, "that it will be a long time before it is necessary for us to make use of this very important legal instrument."

He tapped the bureau as he spoke, and Dmitri gazed at it stupidly.

"You keep it there, Doctor?" he said.

The doctor nodded. "Yes," he said, "along with some other papers."

There was a sound at that moment from the garden and the two men turned suddenly, as the Gothic window was wrenched violently open. There was a tinkle of breaking glass. Dmitri had upset his tumbler and there was a drip of liquid to the floor.

Jenkins stood in the window. He was breathing hard, and on his face was an expression of wild dismay.

"Doctor . . . Doctor . . . " he said thickly, ". . . in the garden . . . he's out there. . . . "

The doctor strode swiftly over to Jenkins and seized him roughly by the shoulder.

"For God's sake, Jenkins, pull yourself together," he said. "What are you talking about?"

"He's out there, just under the window . . . a dead man."

CHAPTER XV

THE CORPSE IN THE CABINET

"Jenkins," said the doctor sharply, "kindly explain at once what has happened."

Jenkins looked vaguely from Shorthouse to Dmitri and back again. His eyes were glassy. He stood between them, his hands shaking, his body leaning heavily on the table. His mouth opened and shut, but no words came. There was foam on his lips.

Shorthouse, who still had him by the arm, bent over and looked him full in the face.

"Jenkins," he said again.

The man shrank a moment from the doctor's glance, but there was no escape, and, for what seemed to Dmitri an interminable time, the two men stared each other in the face. Dmitri watched them uneasily. The doctor was at his tricks again and he did not like them. But they were certainly effective. Already Jenkins was losing that stare of terror. His features were smoothed out as though under the pressure of an invisible hand. He licked his lips once or twice. Then he blinked his eyes and ran a finger round his collar, jerking his head uneasily as he did so.

"Now, Jenkins," said the doctor quietly, "perhaps you'll tell us now what has happened."

"I . . . I 'ave told you," said Jenkins. "It's Stolin . . . out there in the garden. . . . He's dead."

He jerked his thumb in the direction of the yawning gap in the wall made by the Gothic window.

The doctor breathed a sigh of relief and looked at Dmitri. Then he turned to Jenkins and laid his hand, more kindly this time, on his shoulder.

"Well done, Jenkins," he said. "I quite understand. You're a bit upset, but you'll soon get over it."

Jenkins stared at the doctor in bewilderment. Then suddenly he shrank away from him again.

"'Ere, Doctor," he said. "What are you 'inting at?"

"Drink this," said the doctor, offering him a glass of whisky. "You'll be all right in a minute."

Jenkins drank the whisky and set the glass on the table.

"Frankly, Jenkins," Shorthouse continued, "I did not think you had the nerve. But you mustn't give way now. We're all in this and will stand by you. It had to be one of us. If you hadn't done it yourself . . .

"None of that," said Jenkins. "I won't 'ave it, Doctor. I see what you're getting at, but I didn't do it. I didn't, I tell you. You ought to know me better than that."

The doctor looked at him coldly.

"As you say, Jenkins," he said dryly, "I ought to know you better than that."

"For God's sake," broke in Dmitri, "make him tell the story properly."

Jenkins darted a savage look at Dmitri.

"I *am* telling you, ain't I?" he said. "I found 'im in the garden . . . fell over him, I did . . . dead and lying on the ground. It must 'ave happened while I was in the summer'ouse. But I didn't see nothing. It was as dark as the inside of a cow. And I stood there, looking and listening. Once I heard somebody breathin'. But I put that down to my fancy. But it wasn't. It was . . . 'im."

He jerked his thumb over his shoulder with an expressive gesture at the window.

"Next I 'eard what sounded like a footstep, but I couldn't be sure, and after a bit I got tired of waiting in the summer'ouse. So I started to come back to you, but I had not taken more than a dozen paces in the dark when I tripped over something and fell flat. 'E was lying on the path near the rose-bushes. 'E hadn't been dead more 'n twenty minutes or so, for he was still warm."

He turned abruptly on Dmitri.

"You thought you'd been mighty clever, didn't you? Travelin' first-class 'arf over Europe and leadin' 'im nicely 'ome to Sham Castle all the time. It was likely you could throw 'im off, wasn't it? There ain't no flies on Stolin. And now he's copped it good and proper, where the chicken got the axe."

The doctor had walked away from Jenkins, down the room.

"Who can have done this?" he said, as he came back to the table.

"Merril, perhaps," said Dmitri. "He may have come back and run into Stolin suddenly."

Jenkins got to his feet.

"What's that?" he said. "Has Captain Merrill been here?"

"He has," said the doctor shortly. "He came inquiring for you. It seems that the police are after you for that little matter of Goldenberg in the Abbey Road. Mr. Merrill came here to warn you. In fact," continued the doctor grimly, "it looks as though the police may very easily make a rather unfortunate mistake in view of your sinister habit of being so perseveringly in at the death."

But Jenkins did not seem to hear. He had a queer, devoted look in his face and, when he spoke, it was more to himself than to the others.

"That was like the Captain," he said. "He don't let a pal down, not if he can help it. I've been through 'ell with the Captain, and, what's more, I've come out on the other side, which is more nor what I'm likely to do in this bloody show."

"Did Merrill murder Stolin?" broke in Dmitri. "That is the question."

"Murder your grandmuvver," he said. "The Captain don't know Stolin from Adam. Besides, I know who it was."

"You mean?" said the doctor.

"Red Rupert, of course. Who else do you think it was. He's done in Goldenberg, and he's done in

Stolin, and now he's on the track of *us*. He's out there, I tell yer—him and Soly Levinson and Dewpin and the rest of them."

"Why do you think it was Red Rupert?" said the doctor sharply.

"Who else could it 'ave been? D' yer think it was Mrs. Murdoch chasin' him for a blackamoor?"

The doctor was silent for a moment, while the other two looked at him as though waiting for his decision. He spoke at last to Jenkins.

"Stolin is lying out there, you say. How far from the door?"

"A matter of twenty yards," said Jenkins.

"Bring him in, both of you," said the doctor peremptorily.

Jenkins drew back quickly.

"Not much," he said, "not with Red Rupert muckin' around in the garden."

"After you, Doctor," said Dmitri.

The doctor stiffened. His eyes were blazing with anger.

"Please to carry out my instructions," he said. "We can't leave the body there, unless Jenkins is prepared to explain its presence to the police."

"The police," Jenkins echoed.

"We must be ready to meet them, if necessary," said the doctor. "And personally, I should feel a little embarrassed if they began by asking me how there came to be a corpse in the garden. Jenkins, on the other hand, may find it easy to explain so curious a circumstance."

"I didn't know you were expecting the police," said Dmitri.

"I am not *expecting* them," the doctor replied, "but it is as well to be prepared."

"Who should bring the police here?" Jenkins asked.

"Your friend Merrill, perhaps," said the doctor. "He was obviously interested in Irma."

"You mean he suspected something?" said Dmitri.

"I don't know what he suspects," returned the doctor, "but his interest in Irma was, shall we say, exceptional. And it will be just as well, if he should take it into his head to come back here with the local constable, that he should find everything in order."

"Why on earth did you let him go?" said Dmitri.

The doctor laughed bitterly.

"What else could I do? We don't want any further complications. If he came here as a spy, he saw precious little for his pains, and the local constable, if he arrives, will see even less. There is no necessity for panic. So far, nothing serious has happened."

Jenkins stared at the doctor with frightened eyes.

"Nothing," he muttered. "Goldenberg . . . Stolin . . . and Red Rupert out there to finish the job. And you call that nothing."

"Goldenberg . . . dead," said the doctor. "That makes a partner less and an extra share for those who remain. Stolin . . . dead. That means an enemy less, whom we can well afford to spare. We'll deal with Red Rupert when he appears. Meanwhile you

will leave the thinking to me and do as I tell you."

He looked from one to the other.

"Well," he said, "are you or are you not going to carry out my instructions?"

The two men got sullenly to their feet, and for a moment all three of them stood motionless. Jenkins and Dmitri looked uncertainly at the doctor, who did not, however, speak again or even so much as appear to notice them. He had given his orders and he assumed that they would be obeyed. His contemptuous indifference had its effect.

Jenkins moved towards the window.

"Come on, Dmitri," he said.

He disappeared into the garden, and Dmitri, after another look at the doctor, followed him.

Shorthouse, alone in the room, looked about him inquiringly and his eye fell upon the big filing cabinet by his desk. It stood nearly six feet high and was about three feet wide and two feet deep, its front being made of overlapping pieces of wood running in slots, so that when it was unlocked at the top the whole front slid downwards and disappeared seemingly into the floor, but in reality round a roller that was concealed in the foot of it. It was the very thing for the purpose. The doctor unlocked the cabinet and the front of it, on falling, disclosed a number of neat trays spaced one above the other. These he rapidly removed one by one, piling them upon the floor. He had barely finished his preparations when a sound of heavy breathing came to his ears, and Jenkins appeared at the window, carrying,

tucked under his arm, a pair of boots protruding from the ends of muddy trousers. Dmitri followed, bearing the head and shoulders. He too was breathing hard.

They shuffled into the room and laid the body of Stolin on the floor. The face of the Russian in death was drawn and white, but the features were composed. The lips were bloodless and the eyes stared unseeingly at the ceiling above them.

Dmitri stepped back, tripping, as he did so, over a fold in the rug lying on the floor. He slipped and recovered himself only by placing a foot on Stolin's chest. The stale air in the dead lungs came from the half-closed mouth and nostrils with a soft sigh. Dmitri shuddered and crossed himself, and Jenkins took a pace backwards.

"Did you hear that, Doctor?" he muttered. "Is he . . . is he really dead?"

The doctor bent over the body, feeling the heart and the eyeballs.

"Quite dead," he said.

He took the body by the shoulders and turned it over. The three men bent over it. For a moment they could see nothing. Then Jenkins indicated with the toe of his boot a small twisted tear halfway down the left side.

"That's Soly," he said. "He did that with his Eytalian knife. Three edges it has. You pulls it out and the lips close over the wound and you bleeds inside."

"What are we going to do with it?" said Dmitri.

The doctor jerked his head to the window.

"Pull the curtains," he said abruptly.

Dmitri crossed the room and did as he was directed. When he turned around, Jenkins and the doctor were lifting the body and were carrying it towards the filing cabinet. Dmitri came forward to help them and the three of them pushed the body into the place prepared for it. Stolin was somewhat taller than the cabinet, but they bent him a little at the knees. The doctor then pulled up the front of the cabinet until the automatic spring lock at the top snapped home.

"Well," said the doctor, as they came back to the table, "that disposes of *him*—for the moment at any rate. We have now to consider our position. I'm afraid Jenkins is right. This is probably Red Rupert's work. The question arises: What does Red Rupert know, and why is he here? It is possible, of course, that he is merely after Jenkins and that he will be quite happy when he has satisfied that grudge we've heard so much about. But I don't think he'll be satisfied with Jenkins. Otherwise, there was no reason why he should have killed Stolin. I'm afraid we must assume that he knows something about our plans and that he is after the lot of us. In that case, he is likely to be deeply interested in what is going on in this house, and we may expect to hear from him pretty soon."

"You may bet your life on that," said Jenkins.

"Red Rupert don't lose time, as a rule."

"Quite so," said the doctor. "On the other hand,

he's not going to force his way in here without some sort of plan, and he will find it difficult to get into Sham Castle in any case. The windows are bolted and the doors locked. I locked the back door myself, just before dinner."

"What about Mrs. Murdoch?" said Dmitri.

"In bed," said the doctor briefly.

"The weak spot in this house," continued the doctor, "is the kitchen. You two had better therefore settle down there. Take it in turns to sleep."

"An attractive arrangement, Doctor," said Dmitri. "And where will you be in the meantime?"

"Upstairs," replied the doctor. "I'm going to see that nobody gets at Irma."

"And what happens if Captain Merrill turns up with the police?" demanded Jenkins. "I ain't waiting here for any men in blue."

"You've got to wait for them, Jenkins, whether you like it or not. We can't move till the girl is ready. That may happen at any moment, but, even if we have to stay here a week, there's plenty of food in the house, though I'm afraid you will have to deprive yourself of vegetables, Dmitri."

"Thank God," said Dmitri, thinking of Mrs. Murdoch.

"If Red Rupert turns up, we will deal with him together. If the police turn up, I will deal with them myself.

"And that's enough talking for the present," the doctor concluded.

"You've forgotten one thing, Doctor," said Dmitri.

He pointed to the Gothic window.

"Not at all," said the doctor. "I propose to leave the window open and everything just as usual. I've locked the door to the dining room, and if anybody comes in here, the only way out is through the kitchen or back by the way he entered. If he comes upstairs he will find me waiting for him. Any further objections?"

"Well, Doctor," said Dmitri, after a pause, "you're responsible."

"Come along, Dmitri," said Jenkins. "We'll take turn and turn about in the kitchen."

The doctor did not answer, but nodded towards the door, and the two men passed slowly through. The doctor looked after them a moment and then listened intently. Everything was very quiet. He picked up the trays from the filing cabinet which were lying on the floor, and bestowed them neatly one by one in a cupboard, which he locked, putting the key in his pocket. Then, with a last glance round the room, he crossed to the single lamp on the writing table and turned it out, but, almost at once, as though thinking better of it, turned it on again. Better leave it on, he thought. It made the room look more natural. People didn't go to bed as early as all that.

He climbed the stairs, and, turning the corner, walked along the corridor till he reached the door of Irma's room. After listening a moment with his

ear to the panel, he turned the handle softly, and, looking in, noted that she was asleep. He softly withdrew, shut the door and, moving a little way down the corridor, entered his own room, from which he took a chair, setting it down in the corridor outside. From there he could command the head of the main staircase, even to the hall, as well as the top of the servants' staircase which came from the passage just outside the kitchen.

He seated himself comfortably in his chair.

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Merril, on leaving Sham Castle, was accompanied by Dmitri to the crossroads. Thence he went straight to the village, only to be told at the Inn that Granby had left about half an hour before to go for a walk. Merrill was not surprised. Granby, of course, had gone to look for Stolin, and now Merrill must look for Granby. The most likely place was in the neighborhood of Sham Castle, and thither Merrill returned.

For some appreciable time he searched the ground surrounding the house, but he neither saw nor heard anything for his pains. In desperation, for Granby was nowhere to be found, he climbed on to the terrace from which he had an hour ago seen the shadow on the blind. A light was shining through the Gothic window. He approached with the utmost caution and, after some minutes, satisfied himself that the room was empty.

Then, suddenly, against his better judgment, he made up his mind to enter. The thought of Irma alone in that house was too much for him. Granby

had disappeared. He must do what he could—get the girl away himself, if possible; or at least find out what was happening.

He slipped through the window and crossed the hall, lit by a single lamp, full of uncouth shadows and all those heads of beasts sticking from the wall.

Should he climb the stairs? He hesitated. What was it best to do? Mechanically he began to take in the details of the room. It was an odd mixture. That old oak table was Jacobean, but the leather armchairs were modern enough, and so was that filing cabinet against which he was leaning, a curious piece of furniture to have in such a room as this.

He tried the door which Shorthouse had locked and then began to cross the room to the door on the opposite side of the room.

God, what was that?

Merril turned sharply. There was a thin sound outside near the window. Something was scraping the wall of the house. Motionless he stood still where he was, leaning against the cabinet and staring at the window.

Again he heard the thin sound, and surely some one out there was breathing heavily. It was then that he saw a pair of legs dangling rather helplessly in the air and reaching down for some sort of foothold just outside.

Some one was climbing down the front of the house.

Merril took a pace forward. He must be ready for this intruder, whoever he might be. He looked

quickly round for a weapon, keeping his eyes fixed on the legs which continued to wave and grope for a footing.

There was a click behind him.

He swung round to meet this new danger. As he did so, the front of the cabinet against which he had been leaning and which had not been properly secured by the spring catch at the top, slipped down with a crash and disappeared.

What on earth was that? A white face and a crumpled figure. The thing was falling . . . falling towards him. It slipped into his arms, like a drunken man trying vainly to embrace a friend. The face brushed his hand as it fell and the face was cold.

It lay at his feet—the ungainly body of a dead man.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MAN WITH THE RED BEARD

Merril stood gazing at the body on the floor. He forgot for an instant the man at the window, but a light thud on the terrace outside caused him to look hastily around the room for a weapon. There were some heavy fire irons lying dusty and neglected on the huge hearth. He slipped across the room, seized the poker, and moved back again to the side of the window, ready to strike.

"You had better put that poker down, young fellow," came a well-known voice. "You might do me an injury."

"Thank God," said Merrill.

"Yes," said Granby, "it's me. But don't make a song and dance about it."

Merril grasped him nervously by the arm.

"Look," he said, pointing to the figure on the floor.

"Yes," said Granby quietly. "I've seen that already—out there in the garden. It's Stolin—the man I came to meet."

He bent over the body, knelt down, turned it gently over, and remained thus for a moment, gazing at the dead man. Then he looked up at Merrill. His face was set, the blue eyes cold and implacable.

He bent again and touched the body softly on the shoulder.

"Good-by Number 37," he whispered.

"We must get the police," muttered Merrill.

Granby had risen from his knees and was dusting his trousers.

"Give me a hand with him," he said, pointing to Stolin.

"What are you going to do?" Merrill began uncertainly.

"One thing at a time," said Granby. "And no questions, please."

Already he was lifting the body by the shoulders. Mechanically Merrill obeyed him.

"The police are standing by," said Granby, as with Merrill's assistance he began to push the body back into the cabinet. "They are waiting for a word from me, but they won't get it until I know exactly what's going on in this house."

Merril turned away his head from their burden. He felt suddenly sick. His hands were trembling. Swiftly he fought down his nausea. He must keep his wits and carry out his instructions. Granby was used to this sort of thing. He would know what was best to do. Already they had pushed the body into position and Granby pulled up the front of the cabinet which fastened with a click. Then he looked quickly about him.

"I don't like this room," he said. "Too many doors. Do you know your way about?"

Merril shook his head.

"I was coming back to investigate. That door over there is locked."

He pointed to the door which he had tried a few minutes ago.

"And that one," said Granby. He indicated the kitchen door as he spoke.

"I don't know," said Merrill.

"You've seen Shorthouse, of course?"

"Yes," said Merrill. "I've seen the doctor. There's another man with him, a man with a foreign name I didn't catch. Jenkins is here too. At least, so the doctor said. Then there is the girl."

"Irma Brezhoff, as described in the papers?"

"Yes. That's what I wanted to tell you. The doctor has some strange power over her. And she's ill, desperately ill. We must do something at once. She didn't recognize me."

"She must be ill," said Granby dryly. "Death's door, I should think. Why *should* she recognize you?"

"I didn't tell you this before, but I suspected, when I came here, that she might be some one I knew. I was right. I met her over a year ago. She was at Monte Carlo with her father. She . . . we . . . that is to say I . . ."

"I see," said Granby impatiently. "You clicked, you mean."

Merril drew himself up.

"Colonel Granby," he said, "I considered myself as good as engaged to her, and she did not even know who I was."

"What's that?" said Granby sharply. "Got herself engaged to a fellow and she didn't even know his name?"

"She knew me then, of course," replied Merril, "but she didn't know me this evening. And I have never seen any one so changed, so unhappy."

Granby placed a hand on his shoulder.

"So you knew Miss Brezhoff at Monte Carlo?"

"I didn't know her as Miss Brezhoff. She went by the name of Elliot."

"I'm beginning to see light a little," said Granby. "I thought, when I saw those papers, that the name was familiar. I've since remembered. Her father, the ex-Duke Sergius, was murdered about six months ago by the Russian secret police. I now understand why Stolin at Warsaw was gravely preoccupied with a young lady. Before the war he was in the service of the Brezhoffs."

"We must get her away," said Merril.

"That's all very well," said Granby. "But will she come? You say she did not recognize you. And can we get at her without giving the alarm? Besides, there are the people outside."

"Who do you mean?" said Merril.

"I mean the people who followed you from London. They will all be here. Red Rupert, Soly Levinson and Jean Dupin—or, as we call them in the service, Pip, Squeak and Wilfrid."

"Pip, Squeak and Wilfrid?" echoed Merril.

"Code names," said Granby. "Pip is Red Rupert; Squeak is Soly Levinson, your little Jewish friend;

and Wilfrid is the Frenchman, Dupin, who was once a sailor."

Merril looked uneasily at the window.

"When I was here this evening," he said, "Irma came down from her room. Some one had frightened her. That might have been Red Rupert or one of his gang."

"No," said Granby shortly. "That was me. I was cat burgling on the battlements. That was after I had found Stolin in the garden. First time a woman has ever screamed at Granby. I was quite upset."

He stood still a moment, listening intently.

"Pretty sinister," he muttered. "Window open. Lights on. Nobody about. And we've been here for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. Looks as if old Shorthouse were lying in wait as for a prey."

Merril looked about him. To his heightened fancy there was something intelligently watchful in the eyes of the beast-heads on the walls.

"Good Lord," he said suddenly. "What was that?"

There was a sound of hoarse breathing in the corridor that led into the kitchen. The door was flung open and on the threshold stood a gray-haired woman. There was a man's soiled jacket caught about her shoulders, felt slippers on her feet, and a flannel nightdress billowing from the waist downwards.

She stopped dead on seeing the two men.

"Where's the doctor?" she began. "Where's Doctor Shorthouse?"

Granby advanced quickly towards her. She shrank back in the doorway.

"No, you don't," she said. "You keep a respectable distance. I'm not dressed to receive a gentleman, though I may say the doctor's friends is always welcome."

"Hush," said Granby.

"Don't shush me," said the old woman. "I won't be shushed. I want to see the doctor. It's that black man again, and he's been looking in at my window. And me in my bed—as I allus am at this hour of the night."

"I beg your pardon, madam," said Granby. "But did you say a black man?"

"Who else would it be?"

"I'll tell the doctor," said Granby.

"I won't 'ave it," said the old woman, beginning to raise her voice.

"Of course," said Granby.

"Coming into my kitchen at all hours was bad enough. And now, if you please, he looks into my bedroom. It's the last time I ever sleeps on the ground floor. I likes to be private."

"Of course," said Granby.

He hesitated.

"About this black man," he continued. "Where is he now?"

"I never knows where 'e is, from one minute to another. Pops up like a genius, sudden-like at any odd time. But 'e's never looked in at my bedroom, afore. I will say that of 'im, though 'e do 'aunt me

something dreadful—especially in the 'ot weather.”

“Did you see his face?” Granby asked.

“I didn’t exackly see his face,” she replied. “But I know’d it was ’im, though there’s no telling black from white, dark as it is, and me being all of a flutter. I seen ’is figger, as he dropped into the rosebushes under the window. And I wants the doctor to know that it isn’t only my fancy.”

“Very well,” said Granby. “I’ll tell the doctor. And I advise you to go back to your bedroom and lock the door.”

Mrs. Murdoch looked vaguely at Granby and then threw a frightened glance back into the corridor.

“If I might make so bold,” she said, “I’d ask you to see me safe to my room. And if you’d just stand in the passage a moment while I looks under the bed I should feel easier-like.”

“Certainly,” said Granby.

He moved promptly to the door and passed into the corridor.

Merril, who had listened to this conversation in helpless bewilderment, watched them as they left the room.

“Is that all right?” came Granby’s voice from the corridor.

There was an inaudible reply from the old woman, and Granby said something in return.

Presently he came back.

“Poor old thing,” he said, as he entered the room. “Bats in the belfry. Must be one of the doctor’s patients. Or is it the cook? Told me her name was

Murdoch and that her late husband was a missionary. Merrill, I like this place even less than I did five minutes ago. I'm going to call up the police."

He moved forward, as he spoke, and picked up the telephone from the small table near the hearth.

"I've got to talk a bit louder to the exchange. Put your coat over my head. It will smother my voice."

Merril spread his light summer overcoat over Granby and waited.

He heard the slight click of the hook moving up and down, but Granby did not speak, and presently his head appeared above the folds of the coat.

"Pretty sinister," he said, in a low voice. "The line is cut. And that must be pretty recent. They telephoned to you at the 'Long Man' only this evening."

But Merrill had no time to register the small shock of this intelligence, for at that moment a cry rang out from the garden outside, a cry of pain and terror, so heart-rending that it tore their nerves and stiffened them both into helpless attention where they crouched by the telephone. The cry ended in a choking gurgle, and a moment later the curtains in front of the window which Granby had drawn behind him when he had stepped into the room, began to shake. A hand came round the edge of them, fumbling vaguely at the heavy stuff, and then a face appeared, distorted and very white, except about the mouth, from which blood was trickling. The man pitched heavily into the room. The horn

handle of a knife protruded from under the right shoulder blade.

Merril started forward, but Granby's hand closed like a vice on his arm and dragged him back.

"Steady the Buffs," came a quiet voice in his ear.

"It's Jenkins," said Merrill, in tones that seemed to be very far away, while every nerve in his body was crying out, *What next? What next?*

He had not long to wait for an answer. Hardly had Jenkins fallen to the ground than the window curtains were torn violently aside and Dmitri entered. Sweat was running down his forehead. He stumbled blindly over the body of Jenkins where it lay, and shied from it like a frightened horse. He did not see either Merrill or Granby, who were still crouching by the telephone, near the deep embrasure of the hearth.

"Good God, Dmitri, what was that?" A thin urgent voice was speaking from somewhere above the stairs.

Merril looked up. That was the doctor, and he was coming down.

"Th . . . they've got him," said Dmitri, in a high falsetto. "Th . . . they've got him, Doctor." He was shaking like a leaf and had gone entirely to pieces.

"What do you mean?" said the doctor sharply, as he came round the corner of the stairs.

"J . . . J . . . Jenkins," replied Dmitri. "L . . . look. They've got him. He's dead."

He covered his face with his hands and began to sob.

The doctor strode quickly across the room and bent over the body of Jenkins. He rose and turned at once to Dmitri.

"You infernal bunglers," he said. "Where on earth have you been and what are you doing here? I told you and Jenkins to wait in the kitchen."

"He . . . he thought he would be safer outside—up there in the summerhouse," said Dmitri. "Then he began to get nervous about being away from the house and decided to come back. We started. He was in front, not ten yards away from me, when it happened."

Dmitri broke off suddenly.

"Good God," he screamed. "There they are!"

He pointed a shaking finger at Granby and Merril. Granby had risen to his feet and was holding an automatic.

The doctor whipped round.

"Yes, Doctor," came the quiet voice of Granby. "Don't move. I have had you covered for some little time."

The doctor put up his hands. Dmitri was peering across the table.

"You are not Red Rupert," he said. "Doctor," he shouted hysterically, "this can't be Red Rupert. His hair is black."

There was a click, and suddenly a blaze of light from the great iron chandelier above their heads flooded the whole place.

"No, my dear Count," came a smooth voice from the stairs, "that is not Red Rupert, but Red Rupert can always be trusted to be on the spot. Another psychological moment, Mr. Merrill—even better than the last, I fancy."

A man was looking down upon them all from the staircase, a short man wearing a trench coat and a bowler hat. In each of his plump white hands was an automatic leveled at the four men below.

The man was smiling, but the colorless eyes were serious and alert. The man was also bearded, and his beard was red.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GIRL UPSTAIRS

"Put 'em up, Mr. Merrill," lisped a voice from the window.

Merril started from a nightmare into reality. That was Soly Levinson. There he stood, in his flashy clothes, with his great nose drooping over his widely grinning mouth. In his hand was an automatic, and Dupin, the Frenchman, was just behind him, pushing through the window to get into the room with the others. He also had an automatic and it was pointed at Granby.

Granby had said that the room was a trap, and Granby had been right. And it had caught them properly—not only Granby and himself, but Short-house and his friends as well.

Merril raised his hands. Granby, having been told not to move, still held his pistol now leveled uselessly at the doctor.

"Quite an amusing situation," came the voice of Red Rupert, moving slowly down the stairs as he spoke. "The Colonel is holding up the doctor and the sailor is holding up the Colonel. It's like the scene in Sheridan's 'Critic,' all those uncles with their swords and daggers. You'd better drop your wea-

pon, I think, Colonel, unless you would like to shoot the doctor. I haven't any objection."

Granby dropped his automatic and put his hands up.

Red Rupert had reached the bottom of the stairs and was stepping delicately across the room. Short-house took a step forward, and the two men faced each other for a moment in silence.

"The celebrated Rupert Ahrens at last," said the doctor quietly.

Red Rupert nodded.

"Yes," he said. "I am sorry, Doctor, but I am afraid I must ask Mr. Levinson to go through your pockets. Soly . . . would you mind?"

He jerked his head as he spoke, and Soly, moving from the window and handing his pistol to Dupin, crossed the room towards the doctor and began to search him with a practised hand. He pulled out various articles and laid them on the table close by. Then, at a sign from Red Rupert, he did the same for Dmitri.

Red Rupert turned to Granby.

"It's some time since we met, Colonel," he said. "Several years, in fact. Let me think. When was the last occasion?"

"At the Old Bailey," replied Granby shortly. "You were in the dock. Robbery with violence. Three years, if I remember rightly."

Red Rupert smiled.

"Quite right, Colonel," he said. "And *you* were the principal witness against me. Thank you for the

reminder. I won't forget it again. Then, of course, there was that other occasion, in Munich, wasn't it, in—er—1915, or was it 1916? Soly will know."

"February, 1916, boss," said Soly, laying down the last of the articles taken from Dmitri's pocket.

Red Rupert nodded again.

"That was one up to you, Colonel," he said. "But we shall shortly be all square, thanks to Emily."

He smiled at Merrill.

"Mr. Merrill will have told you about Emily. A useful creature. He may also have told you that, when he traveled to York this afternoon, he sat next to a clergyman."

"I see," said Granby.

"Yes," said Red Rupert. "That was me. We discussed the rejection of the Prayer Book."

He looked pleasantly round the room.

"Quite a merry little party," he went on, "but rather too numerous. I'm sorry, Colonel, but I have urgent business to discuss with our kind but unexpected host. So I must ask you and your friend Mr. Merrill to retire to another room. Let me see, that door over there leads, I think . . ."

"To the kitchen, boss," Levinson interposed.

"Thank you, Soly," Red Rupert continued. "Sorry to offer you such humble quarters, Colonel."

Granby made no reply, but began to move at once towards the door.

"Look here," burst in Merrill. "What the devil do you think you are playing at?"

Granby laid a hand on his arm.

"Come on, young fellow-my-lad," he said. "It's no use exchanging compliments. Only a waste of time."

"Quite so, Colonel," said Red Rupert approvingly. "And time presses, as the monkey said when the clock fell on his head. Lead the way please, Colonel. And I'm afraid I shall have to ask my friend, Dupin, to tie you up. You are in good hands, let me tell you. Dupin is a sailor. It's quite a pleasure to see him with a piece of rope."

Merril followed Granby through the door and together they moved down the passage into the kitchen. It was a large room with a stone floor, in darkness except for the moonlight, until Levinson lit a candle, which he found upon the table. Dupin produced some rope and tied them both up, tightening the cord with an evident satisfaction.

Merril was sitting now on a wooden chair, his hands jammed against the back of it, and a piece of rope binding his chest. And there was Granby, just the other side of him, already gagged and trussed in a similar fashion. Then came the final indignity. Soly produced his orange silk handkerchief, rammed it into Merrill's mouth so that it almost choked him, and knotted it firmly at the back of his head. He then blew out the candle and followed Dupin from the room, leaving Merrill and Granby alone in the darkness.

Red Rupert was waiting in the great hall with his other prisoners. Dmitri, with ashen face and shaking fingers, still stood by the table, where he

had collapsed on stumbling over Jenkins. The doctor held himself erect. He looked quietly, even contemptuously, at the smiling face in front of him.

"You referred, Ahrens," he said at last, "to certain business which we have to discuss. Conversation will be a little fatiguing in this position."

He glanced up at his hands as he spoke.

"Quite," said Red Rupert. "I suggest that you sit down over there by the table. Put your hands upon it, please, palms downwards. You too, Mr. Sterling, or should I perhaps say Count Dmitri Soubirotff?"

Dmitri, with an effort, faced his tormentor.

"You may drop the Count," he said. He tried to give a jaunty turn to his words, but his lips were twitching.

"Ah, there you are, Soly," continued Red Rupert, as Levinson entered from the kitchen, followed by Dupin. "I think you'd better stay here with me a moment and keep an eye upon these gentlemen while Dupin has a look at the car."

"*Cette saloperie de bagnole,*" grumbled Dupin, "*avec son sacré moteur en pâté de foie.* It will take some time for the reparation. I felicitate myself that we were able to arrive. To depart is, at present, impossible."

"Time enough for that," said Red Rupert. "But have it ready, please, as soon as possible."

Dupin, turning to leave the room, trod on Jenkins, where he lay upon the floor. He stumbled and nearly fell. Red Rupert looked down on the pros-

trate body, an expression of polite disgust on his face.

"We were forgetting Jenkins," he said. "Would you mind taking him away . . . somewhere outside? And remove the knife, please. It's still in him, I suppose."

Shorthouse looked at his adversary.

"Not a pleasant sight, is it, Ahrens?" he remarked.

"As you say, Doctor," said Red Rupert, placing himself in an armchair and turning his back on the body. "And I do so dislike that sort of thing. But I don't think he can have suffered much, though it's some time since I threw a knife. A very useful accomplishment, Doctor; I learned it in Naples, but I am out of practice. It was not done as neatly as I would wish."

"He's not quite dead, boss." It was Levinson who spoke. He was helping Dupin to carry Jenkins through the window.

"Dear me," said Rupert, lighting a cigarette, as they disappeared with their burden, "that was careless of me. Blood, too, from the mouth. I was afraid I aimed too low. I must have touched the lung."

"You had better take him a cushion, Soly," he went on to Levinson, who had now returned.

"A cushion, boss?" repeated Soly in bewilderment.

"Yes," said Red Rupert; "take him a cushion—for his head."

Soly, still bewildered, moved towards one of the

armchairs and picked up a cushion. At the window he paused. Red Rupert was speaking again.

"Don't put it *under* his head, Soly," came the drawling voice.

"What will I do with it, then, boss?" inquired Soly.

"Put it on his face," replied Red Rupert softly.

"But it will smother him, boss."

"Yes," said Red Rupert. "That's the idea. I don't want him to linger. I am a humane man."

"Good God," muttered Dmitri.

He looked with horror at the smiling man in the chair with his honey-sweet voice. What was it Jenkins had said? Merciless . . . merciless, and laughing like a ninny all the time. Jenkins had been right, after all. The man was a devil.

Dmitri eyed the decanter. How he longed for a drink. . . . That was Soly who had just come back, and Dupin had left the room, presumably to mend the car which had broken down. What was going to happen next?

Red Rupert turned to Levinson.

"Soly," he said, "have you got that knife?"

Dmitri started almost out of his chair. The breath came sharply between his teeth.

Red Rupert smiled.

"No, Mr. Sterling," he said, "not yet."

He took the long lean blade from Soly, wiped it on the tablecloth, and folding it up carefully put it into his pocket.

Soly took up a position beside the window, while

Red Rupert, relaxing his vigilance, sank back comfortably in the chair.

"That's better," he said. "I think, now, we shall be quite undisturbed. Our friends in the kitchen are not likely to give us any trouble. So while Dupin is busy with the car and Mr. Levinson tries to take a more or less intelligent interest in the proceedings, I propose to sit here and listen to you, Doctor."

"Indeed," said Shorthouse. "And what is to be the subject of our conversation?"

Red Rupert gazed at him in admiration.

"You're a cool customer, Doctor Shorthouse," he said. "Your friend, on the other hand, is anxious, distinctly anxious; and, perhaps, in this case, he sees farther than you do."

"He has seen quite enough," said the doctor. "First Stolin and then Jenkins. He is naturally a little upset."

"To be sure," said Red Rupert. "There was Stolin. He met Mr. Levinson in the garden, and there was a slight misunderstanding."

"There wasn't any misunderstanding, boss," put in Soly. "It was me or him. He never made a sound, and I left him lying where he fell."

"That was very careless of Soly," said Red Rupert, "and I went with him at once to the garden to see for myself what could be done about it. It was then that we met Jenkins, and after that we had to move quickly. I did not like the look of the Gothic window—altogether too inviting, Doctor. So . . ."

"You climbed the battlements and descended upon us from above," interrupted Shorthouse.

"Exactly. And you may imagine my astonishment, Doctor, when I found Colonel Granby arresting *you*. What was the charge, I wonder?"

"You must ask Colonel Granby, if you want to know."

"He had found Stolin, perhaps, in the garden?"

"Perhaps."

"And where is he now—Stolin, I mean?"

"He is here," replied the doctor shortly. "In that cabinet."

Red Rupert looked towards the cabinet distastefully.

"Dear me," he said. "How very unpleasant. I do so dislike that sort of thing, as you know. I'm so sensitive."

He paused and, producing a little pad from his pocket, began to polish his finger nails.

"Stolin," he went on, spreading his fingers in front of him and admiring the result, "came here to find *you*, Doctor. He never expected to see one of us."

The doctor moved impatiently. Red Rupert smiled at the gesture.

"All in good time, Doctor," he said. "I shan't keep you very long. I'm going to be frank with you. Frankness is my long suit."

"Then play it quickly, for God's sake," said Dmitri.

"Yesterday," continued Red Rupert, taking no

notice of this outburst, "there were four of you in this business—Goldenberg, Jenkins, Mr. Sterling and yourself. This morning there were three, and now there are only two. I wonder how many there will be to-morrow?"

He looked benevolently at Dmitri as he spoke.

"Hadn't you better come to the point, Ahrens," said the doctor coolly. "You evidently like the sound of your own voice. To me, if I may say so, it is less agreeable."

"The doctor's right, boss," lisped Soly from the window. "Let's get down to brass tacks."

"What are the brass tacks, Levinson?" inquired the doctor. "I shall be interested to know."

"A quaint expression, Doctor," said Red Rupert. "Mr. Levinson is referring, I think—"

He paused wilfully and leaned forward, gripping the table with his plump fingers and thrusting his bearded face with the crimson lips towards them.

"He is referring, I think—to the girl upstairs," he finished softly.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DESPERATE REMEDY

The doctor was in no way disconcerted. He looked with distaste at the face thrust suddenly towards his own.

"You are alluding to my patient, Miss Elliot?" he said at last.

"Or shall we say," continued Red Rupert softly, "to Irma Brezhoff, daughter and heiress of the ex-Grand Duke Sergius of Russia."

"I am a doctor, Ahrens," Shorthouse said indifferently. "The identity of my patient is quite a secondary matter."

Red Rupert glanced at him for a moment and then leaned back in his chair.

"Quite," he said. "The professional attitude. And you had no idea, of course, that plain Miss Elliot—no allusion to the lady's personal appearance intended—was Irma Brezhoff, daughter of the ex-Grand Duke Sergius. Come, Doctor, let us, as Mr. Levinson has suggested, get down to brass tacks. It comes to this, I think. You have abducted a young lady. She is now, shall we say, under my protection. You know my methods. Or perhaps you don't. My motto is 'Reap where others sow.' Rather a good one, don't you think?"

"A very sound motto," replied Shorthouse, "and one which might suitably be inscribed on the note-paper of many business houses. But I don't quite see how it applies to us."

"Oh, surely, Doctor. You're not such a fool as Dmitri looks. I have done my best to make the position clear. I followed Stolin from Russia. I followed Goldenberg from Warsaw. I followed Mr. Merrill from London. And at last we have reached Sham Castle. Everybody concerned in this business is now either dead or here in this house at my disposal. Why not be frank with me? Frankness . . ."

"Is your long suit," interrupted the doctor. "You've said that before."

"Why not return the compliment?"

"I'm quite prepared to be frank," said the doctor. "The girl upstairs is, as you say, Irma Brezhoff. She is an heiress and she inherits from her father a fortune of over £400,000. Most of it is invested in Spain and all of it is invested outside Russia."

"Pinch me, boss," exclaimed Soly. "When do we wake up?"

"Quite soon, Mr. Levinson," replied Shorthouse. "Irma Brezhoff, to claim her fortune, has to establish her identity in law. That is the first step."

"And what is the difficulty?" asked Red Rupert. "I suppose it will be quite easy for her to do so. I presume there are . . . papers."

The doctor looked at him steadily.

"There are, as you say, papers."

"I wonder what has become of them," said Red

Rupert blandly. "We have searched you and we have searched Mr. Sterling."

There was a slight noise from the window as he spoke, and Dupin came into the room.

"That sacred auto," he began. "Not an inch will he budge."

He displayed his grimy hands as he spoke, covered with oil and grease.

"I'm sorry about your hands," said Red Rupert. "Always tell a gentleman by his hands," he murmured, looking complacently at his finger tips.

"But tell me, Dupin," he went on, "did you search our friend Mr. Jenkins when you carried him outside?"

Dupin nodded.

"And what did you find?"

Dupin pulled from his pocket a dirty handkerchief of which the four corners were knotted. He crossed the room and, untying the knots, emptied the contents on the table. It needed but a glance to see that there were not any papers.

"Thank you, Dupin," said Red Rupert. "You'd better go back to the car now."

"I come only for a little consummation," said Dupin hastily, pouring himself out a whisky and soda at the table.

"A pity about your car," said the doctor, as Dupin drank off the whisky and moved to the window. "I'm afraid ours will not be of any use to you, either. Dmitri took the magneto to pieces only this morning."

"One moment, Dupin," said Red Rupert, as the man was about to disappear through the window.

"Take a look at that bureau, will you."

He indicated the tall Empire bureau.

"The key, I perceive, is in the lock," he added, as Dupin turned aside to carry out his instructions.

"All this searching," grumbled Dupin, as he got to work. "What good does it do? They know perfectly well where the papers are. If you would only leave it a little to me, *chef*, I would have them out of them in no time."

"I'm afraid you don't quite understand the position," said Red Rupert. "These gentlemen are my partners."

He turned pleasantly to Shorthouse.

"He's after your thumbs, Doctor," he said. "A curious fancy, but as a mental specialist it should rather appeal to you."

Shorthouse moved impatiently.

"You are wasting your time, Ahrens," he said. "You won't find anything of importance in that bureau."

Dupin had pulled down the front of the piece of furniture in question. Behind was a row of drawers. He drew them out rapidly, one by one, and glanced at the contents.

"Bills," he remarked. "All paid."

"A man of method, I perceive. It's a pleasure to do business with you, Doctor," observed Red Rupert.

"You haven't—yet," replied the doctor shortly.

"A pleasure in store," returned Red Rupert unmoved. "You remember my motto: I reap where others sow."

"'Ullo, what is this?" came the voice of Dupin from the back of the room.

He was reading a white sheet of paper which he had taken from a long blue envelope.

"Here is something I do not understand," he announced.

Red Rupert held out his hand.

"Let me have a look at it, Dupin," he said.

He took the paper, read it in silence and glanced smilingly over the edge of it at Dmitri.

"My dear Count," he said, "how very interesting. This appears to be a will—drawn in your favour by your . . . wife. I didn't know you were married."

"I am not," said Dmitri shortly.

"No?" said Red Rupert. "Then I wonder what this paper means. Let us see what it says:

"I, Irma Sterling, née Brezhoff, being of sound mind and in possession of my full mental faculties, hereby leave and bequeath everything of which I die possessed to my beloved husband, Donald Sterling, British subject naturalized on the 17th June in the year 1922, and known prior to that date as Count Dmitri Soubiroff, late of the Second Imperial Regiment of Horse Guards of his lamented Majesty Nicolas II, Czar of all the Russians.

Signed

Witnessed."

"But there's no signature," added Red Rupert, as he laid down the paper, "at least, not yet."

Dmitri was uneasy. He had always been uneasy about that will. It had been necessary, of course, as a precaution. But why had the doctor always laid such stress upon it? That was a question which he had never really faced. But he would have to face it now.

Red Rupert was looking at him with a peculiar expression in his colorless eyes. The man was lighting a cigarette, but that was only a blind. Red Rupert was going to probe this matter of the will to the bottom.

The smooth voice had begun again.

"So you're going to be married, Count," it was saying.

"I am," said Dmitri shortly.

"Quite soon, I expect," Red Rupert continued.

"The date has not yet been fixed."

"No? Perhaps it is a little early yet to fix the date."

Red Rupert paused and exhaled a cloud of smoke.

"I'm afraid I still don't quite understand," he went on. "Let us suppose that Mr. Sterling has married Irma Brezhoff. What happens then? Miss Brezhoff, I understand, is very rich."

"You know the facts," said Dmitri.

"I know the facts," Red Rupert answered, "but I don't altogether appreciate their bearing. You, my dear Mr. Sterling, presumably hope to enjoy part of that lady's fortune, but I was under the impression that in English law the property of the wife

was inviolate. The husband can do nothing with it unless she agrees."

"I am quite aware of that," said Dmitri.

"I see," continued Red Rupert; "you take her consent for granted."

"I hope I shall know . . . how to induce my wife . . . to fulfill her obligations," replied Dmitri.

Dmitri moved uneasily in his chair. Why was it so difficult to answer these obvious questions?

"And *you*, Doctor," said Red Rupert, turning suddenly on Shorthouse. "Do the obligations extend so far? Or do you propose to charge the future Countess a hundred thousand or so for medical attention before marriage?"

Dmitri looked from Red Rupert to the doctor and back again. There was something between them, something in their minds which he had no desire to investigate. He would answer Red Rupert himself. He did not want to hear anything the doctor might have to say on the subject.

"I shall see . . . of course," said Dmitri, "that my wife . . . provides suitably for Doctor Shorthouse."

"I see," answered Red Rupert.

He turned the will delicately between his fingers.

"Then it seems that this document," he continued, "is merely in the nature of a precaution—in case the lady dies on you, I mean?"

"Of course," said Dmitri. "Merely a precaution. It's quite a usual arrangement, isn't it?"

"Quite . . . quite," Red Rupert softly agreed.

"And in this case it may be *particularly* useful."

He paused and added suddenly, "By the way, Count, what are you going to do with the doctor after you are married?"

Dmitri looked again at his tormentor. Would this never cease? He felt as though he were being forced back upon something which at all costs he must avoid. And yet he could not avoid it. He must answer . . . answer . . . until there was no escape.

"Doctor Shorthouse," he said, "will continue to be my wife's medical attendant."

"I see," said Red Rupert again.

He was still playing with the will. He tapped it now playfully with a plump finger.

"I am beginning to appreciate more fully the importance of this document," he said.

Dmitri pushed his chair back abruptly, so that it rasped upon the boards. There was panic in his eyes.

"Wh . . . what are you driving at?" he said. His voice was out of control. It ended upon a shrill note of hysteria.

"Let us suppose," continued Red Rupert, "that the doctor, who is to be your wife's medical attendant, should at any time prefer to take his share in the deceased's estate, it would not be very difficult to arrange—the decease, I mean."

It had come at last. It had to be faced. But the thing, of course, was monstrous. He had never in-

tended it for a moment. The doctor had never intended it.

"Doctor . . . doctor," Dmitri said urgently, "say he is lying. There has never been any idea in your mind of . . ."

Red Rupert leaped to his feet and reached the table with a single bound. He struck it lightly with his fist.

"Of killing the blushing bride, if such a course should prove financially desirable," he snapped. "That's what you mean, isn't it?"

"Doctor," Dmitri implored, "you never intended . . ."

"Of course not," said the doctor, cutting him short.

"You mean yes, don't you?" said Red Rupert, looking from one to the other.

"I mean what I said," answered the doctor.

"In that case, why did you have it ready—the will, I mean?" asked Red Rupert.

"That, as you have yourself suggested, was only a precaution," said the doctor. "I never regarded it as of much importance."

He was looking full at Red Rupert as he spoke, and Dmitri, watching them, knew not only that Red Rupert did not believe the doctor, but that the doctor did not expect to be believed. Dmitri started to his feet.

"Yes, you did," he said, in a voice that shook. "You were talking about it here only this evening. You said it was essential. My God, what have I been doing?"

Red Rupert smiled. He was still looking at the doctor.

"Your friend does not seem to have been entirely in your confidence," he said. "He seems quite upset."

"What did he expect?" replied Shorthouse indifferently. "It was obvious that it might be necessary to use the will."

"Or to arrange for the will to be necessary," added Red Rupert softly.

Dmitri, with the truth he had evaded forced inexorably upon him, suddenly lost all control of himself.

"You devil," he raved at the doctor. "You can leave me out of this. Do you hear?"

"Don't be hasty, my dear Count," said Red Rupert. "Doctor Shorthouse has told us that the will is only a precaution and I am sure that the girl will be given every chance. It is just possible, however, that your fascinations may prove less fatal than the doctor's remedies."

He turned to the doctor.

"I'm afraid," he said sympathetically, "that you must have been having rather a difficult time with your friend and partner. He should be made of sterner stuff. Let us, however, disregard him for a moment. There are more important matters to discuss. We have still to settle this question of the papers."

Shorthouse hesitated a moment.

"The papers," he said at last, "will reach us here to-morrow morning by the first post."

Dmitri sat down helplessly in his chair. So that was the game. The doctor and Red Rupert were going to work together. Well, he was quit of them now. He would not go on with them another inch of the way.

"Indeed," said Red Rupert. "And how do they come to be in the post?"

"They were posted by Merrill to Jenkins from York this evening," replied the doctor. "Merril himself brought them from London. Jenkins gave them to him yesterday night for greater safety."

"Thank you, Doctor. I perceive that you have decided to . . . er . . . coöperate. At what time are the papers likely to arrive?"

"By the first post," said the doctor. "Quite early in the morning, between half-past seven and eight."

"Excellent," said Red Rupert. "Then all we have to do is to wait for the postman."

Shorthouse smiled. It was a confidential smile, addressed to himself, as though he were enjoying a joke which nobody else could ever hope to share.

"No, Ahrens," he said. "Not quite all."

"What do you mean?" Red Rupert snapped.

Something in the doctor's tone had startled him, and for a moment his gentility was disconcerted.

"You've been very frank with me, Ahrens. But you've played your long suit, and the rest of the tricks are mine."

"I still don't understand."

"I think I've already pointed out that Miss Brezhoff, to claim her fortune, will have to prove her identity."

"We shall have the papers," said Red Rupert. "It only remains for Miss Brezhoff to present them to the proper authorities."

"Exactly. But Miss Brezhoff is at present unable to do so."

"I presume she can be persuaded?"

"I'm afraid not, Ahrens."

Red Rupert looked keenly at the doctor.

"Why, what's the matter with the girl?" he asked.

"Nothing," said the doctor, "except that she cannot remember who she is."

Red Rupert got to his feet.

"Is this true, Doctor?" he asked.

"Send for her if you like. Miss Brezhoff lost her memory in Russia, and I have been trying for some while to cure her. I hope in time to succeed."

Red Rupert took a turn up the room and back again.

"This throws rather a new light on the position," he said. "The girl must obviously be made to know who she is, and I'm afraid I can hardly claim to be an expert in mental science. It amounts to this, in fact: you are in my hands, Doctor, and I am in yours."

"I congratulate you, Ahrens. Your diagnosis of the case is admirable."

"Well, Doctor, it only leaves one way out that I can see. As I said before, we shall have to co-

operate. And that brings us back to our friend, Mr. Sterling. Is he also to be one of the partners? Or shall we have to find another bridegroom?"

Red Rupert had recovered his equanimity. He turned, smiling, upon Dmitri.

"Come," he said. "You're not going to be so ungallant as to leave the young lady in the lurch?"

"I've told you already," said Dmitri doggedly, fixing his dull eyes on the smiling lips in front of him. "I'll have nothing further to do with either of you."

"Very well," said Red Rupert indifferently. "I don't wish to press you unduly. You may come in with us or, if you prefer, you can go in with Jenkins."

"Wh . . . what do you mean—go in with Jenkins?" stammered Dmitri. "Jenkins is dead."

"Jenkins, as you say, is dead; but he is not yet buried. We shall probably bury him this evening. You may go in with him if you like."

Dmitri stared wildly from Red Rupert to Short-house. But the face of the doctor was implacable, and Red Rupert continued:

"I'm sure Jenkins will not object, nor, of course, will Stolin, who will also have to share his resting place. Rather close quarters, I'm afraid, but you'll soon cease to notice it."

There was a long pause. Dmitri looked desperately about him. Then he gave a shuddering sigh and bowed his head on the table.

"You've got me," he said. "What can I do? Have

it as you damn well please. But, for God's sake, give me a drink."

Rupert signed to Soly, who crossed the room, and, pouring out a stiff whisky and soda, brought it to Dmitri. The man's hands were shaking so much that Soly had to hold the glass to his lips.

"Well, Doctor," said Red Rupert, "it now only remains for us to restore Miss Brezhoff's memory and to secure her consent to certain legal formalities."

"Exactly, Ahrens. And you'd better leave that part of the work to me."

Red Rupert did not answer at once. The smiling mask had gone blank and the colorless eyes stared unwinkingly at the wall in front of him.

"I've been thinking, Doctor," he said at last.

"Any result?" inquired Shorthouse indifferently.

"Yes and no. My first idea was to leave Miss Brezhoff to you, but I realize, on reflection, that such a course is impossible. I'm afraid we can't trust any longer to the healing hand of time. You've done your best, I'm sure, but if Miss Brezhoff's memory is to be of any use to us, she will have to recover it without delay. I propose, therefore, with your permission, to ask her to come down to us here. I've decided to see what I myself can do."

The doctor rose from his chair. For the first time that evening he was obviously disturbed.

"What are you proposing, Ahrens?" he asked. "I must warn you seriously not to interfere with my patient. I won't be answerable for the consequences if you do."

Red Rupert moved to the Gothic window. He took no notice of the doctor.

"Soly," he said, "please go upstairs and ask Miss Brezhoff to come down."

Soly moved obediently to the staircase.

"I tell you, Ahrens," broke in the doctor, "that, if you attempt in any way to threaten my patient, you will do her the gravest injury. I have already done everything that a man can do."

"Not everything, Doctor. And please don't get excited. Such emotion is, if I may say so, unbecoming in a man of science. There is no need for you to be alarmed. I am not going to threaten Miss Brezhoff."

"What are you going to do?" repeated Short-house.

Red Rupert did not answer at once, but walked over to the cabinet in which Stolin was concealed. He examined the spring lock for a moment and then turned back to the doctor.

"I once knew a man in Russia," he said, "who went out of his mind from shock. Such cases are not uncommon in that country. It was a bad case and the doctors had given him up. One day, however, he recovered his wits as suddenly as he had lost them. And the cure was very simple. It was what you doctors, I think, would call a homepathic remedy."

"You are talking nonsense," said the doctor shortly.

"Or perhaps we might call it a hair of the dog that bit you," Red Rupert continued smoothly.

"Anyhow, there it was. The poor fellow lost his memory from one shock; we restored it with another."

"Don't be a fool, Ahrens. What are you going to do?"

"I am going to try a similar remedy in the case of Miss Brezhoff. I am going to show her Stolin."

There was a short silence in the room.

"You can't do that," protested Dmitri.

"You will send her completely out of her mind," said the doctor.

Red Rupert looked from one to the other. He had ceased to smile; the colorless eyes were narrowed. When he spoke again it was in a high brittle tone, quite unlike his ordinary drawling voice.

"Are you quite sure?" he said. "You've done what you can and we have no further time to lose."

"It's kill or cure," said the doctor.

"I'm prepared to take the risk. The girl will recognize Stolin if she is ever going to recognize anybody again. He was her father's secretary. He got her out of Russia. It's the short cut and we're bound to take it."

There was a sound from the staircase, and Soly appeared from the corridor upstairs. He was leading Irma, holding her firmly by the wrist. Her face was white and drawn, and she looked down in bewilderment on the men in the room below, till suddenly, catching sight of the doctor, she ran hastily down the stairs towards him.

"Doctor," she said, "who is this man? He says

that you want to see me. Is it true? Is he a friend of yours?"

Shorthouse looked at Red Rupert who stood now beside the cabinet.

"Yes, Irma," he said with difficulty. "It is quite all right. There is no need for you to be frightened."

"Tell her to stand over there," said Red Rupert in a low tone.

The doctor took the girl gently by the arm and led her towards the cabinet.

"Soly," continued Red Rupert, in the same low tone, "go and stand by the window and keep both our friends well covered."

Soly went obediently to the window; and, on a gesture from Red Rupert, the doctor left Irma and moved back to where Dmitri was sitting.

"Now, Miss Brezhoff," said Red Rupert, "I want you to come over here for a moment."

Irma looked at him uncertainly.

"Who are you?" she asked. "And why do you call me by that name?"

She turned to Shorthouse.

"Doctor," she begged, "Who is he? What does it mean?"

"Do not look at Doctor Shorthouse," came the quiet voice of Red Rupert. "Look at me."

Fascinated by his authority, Irma turned her head.

"Yes," she answered, "what is it?"

"I addressed you just now as Miss Brezhoff,"

said Red Rupert, still in the same quiet tone, "because that is really your name. And there is a friend here, some one you know very well, who can prove what I say. You are not Miss Elliot at all, but Irma Brezhoff. You have only to see this friend of yours, and you will remember . . . everything . . . Do you understand?"

Irma looked at him doubtfully.

"Are you another doctor?" she almost whispered.

"Never mind who I am," he answered. "Please come over here."

Irma looked to right and left a moment. Then, hesitatingly, she left the shadow of the stairs and began to cross the room.

Red Rupert stood waiting for her by the cabinet. He raised his hand to the spring lock. About a yard from the cabinet Irma stopped.

"Look," said Red Rupert. "There is your friend."

He released the spring. There was a click and a rattle as the front of the cabinet slipped down into its grooves. And there, rigid in the unnatural posture it had assumed in that narrow space, was the body of Stolin. The head had fallen back on the crouching shoulders and the glittering eyes stared up from the shadow.

No one moved. Irma caught her breath sharply. It was the only sound they heard.

Then, at last, she moved forward. She put out a hand incredulously, till it rested on the forehead of the dead man. She drew back with a quick cry, then bent forward again and stared hard at the body.

"It's Stolin," she whispered. "It's Vladimir Stolin."

Then suddenly, lifting her head and facing them all, she said:

"How does he come to be here . . . dead? Who has done this?"

Nobody spoke and she looked once more at the body. She seemed to forget them again and was intent only on what she saw. She stood as in a dream and started to speak on a low note, growing stronger as she continued, but still more to herself than to the men who were watching her.

"I remember everything now. He got me out of Russia at the risk of his life. He went there with my father at the beginning of the year. I implored my father not to go, but he insisted. He said he could trust them. But they arrested him and killed him before my eyes."

Her voice broke on the last phrase, and suddenly she buried her face in her hands and burst into a passion of tears.

Shorthouse moved hastily forward and put an arm across her shoulders. He led her to one of the chairs. She sat down, still shaken by her weeping.

"You have done the trick, boss," whispered Soly, in a hush of admiration.

Dmitri had not moved since the front of the cabinet had fallen. He looked at Red Rupert, whose face was entirely without expression. That man was a devil. But he had succeeded where the doctor had failed. If only the girl would stop crying.

"You are quite all right now, Miss Brezhoff," the doctor was saying. "And you shall leave this house to-morrow. But now you must go upstairs and go quietly to sleep."

The girl looked at him doubtfully and then hesitatingly she rose and gazed about her. Suddenly she caught sight of Red Rupert and Levinson.

"Doctor," she said, "who are these men? I . . . I . . . haven't seen them before, have I?"

"Yes, you have," replied the doctor quietly. "They are . . . friends of mine."

"Come, Miss Brezhoff," he continued. "You have had rather a bad shock, and I want you now to go to your room and get a little rest while we . . . we do what we can."

She looked towards the open cabinet.

"You mean poor Stolin?"

"Yes. There is a great deal to do."

"You will communicate with the police, you mean?"

"You may be sure that we shall act for the best. Please leave all that to me."

He had gone to her as she stood, still uncertain what to do, and was leading her to the staircase. His authority was still sufficient, and she yielded to him as from habit.

At the foot of the stairs she paused.

"Very well, Doctor," she said. "You will tell me in the morning what you have decided to do."

Red Rupert, who had watched them cross the room, signalled to Levinson.

"Follow them upstairs," he said quietly, "and see that the doctor does not play us any further tricks. And, as soon as he has put her to bed, bring him back to us here."

"Very good, boss."

Soly stepped lightly after the doctor and Irma, and Red Rupert was left alone with Dmitri. He looked distastefully at the body of Stolin in the cabinet, and crossing towards it, bent and pulled up the shutter, which fastened again with a click. As he did so, a voice came unexpectedly from the window, and he turned quickly to meet it.

Dupin was looking into the room, his face streaky with grime and sweat.

"That sacred auto," he said, "it has thirty-six devils, name of a name of a purple dog."

Red Rupert smiled genially upon his friend.

"My poor Dupin," he said. "You seem to be having trouble. I must remind you, however, that it is essential that the car should be in proper working order in time for an early start to-morrow."

"I do my best, but it is not easy."

"Perhaps Mr. Sterling will lend a hand," said Red Rupert, looking towards Dmitri. He knows all about magnetos and things like that. He took one to pieces only this morning, apparently. Mr. Sterling, would you mind?"

Dmitri looked resentfully at the smiling lips and from them to the bleak eyes that rested on him so unwinkingly. He got to his feet, and Dupin, shooting

out an arm, placed a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"On va salir tes pattes blanches. Allons," he said.

Red Rupert, alone in the room, strolled easily to the table. He lit a cigarette from the doctor's box and blew a thoughtful ring, looking up quickly, however, as the doctor and Levinson appeared on the stairs.

The doctor moved quietly across the room and sank into an armchair.

"Well, partner," he said. "I must congratulate you."

Rupert waved his cigarette.

"There are still difficulties," he said. "We have yet to bring the young lady to reason. She will presumably want to know all about Stolin and why she is to marry Dmitri and make a will in his favor. One thing at a time, however. I have no doubt that we shall be able to persuade Miss Brezhoff to do what we want. I am glad to see, Doctor, that she still has confidence in you, and that you have an excellent manner—almost paternal in fact. Meanwhile it is, perhaps, time to deal with Colonel Granby and Mr. Merril—especially Colonel Granby, who is by way of being an old acquaintance of mine. Soly, too, has met him before. You've got your knife into him, haven't you, Soly?"

"Not yet, boss," said Soly.

"Please bring him in," ordered Red Rupert. "A short conversation with the Colonel may help to pass the time."

"Very good, boss."

Soly moved obediently to the kitchen door as he spoke.

"Shall I bring Merrill as well?" he inquired, on reaching it.

"No," replied Red Rupert, "Mr. Merrill is rather a dull young man. The Colonel will be more amusing."

Soly disappeared into the corridor and presently they heard footsteps returning.

Granby stood in the doorway.

"Take out the gag," said Red Rupert.

"Thank you . . . Soly. Now, Colonel, if you don't mind . . ."

CHAPTER XIX

THE MAN WITH THE BLACK FACE

Merril woke with a start. Or had he ever been asleep? Time had ceased in that dark kitchen, smelling of cooked vegetables and dirty dishes. He moved slightly, but caught his breath at the pain of it. No, he had not been asleep. This torture of limbs constricted by the tight cords was no bad dream but an agonizing reality. He had, during the last forty-eight hours, blundered from one crude situation to another, and now, to crown it all, he had been tied up by one set of ruffians and left to cool his heels in the kitchen which belonged to another set.

There passed before his tired mind in an endless circle the horrors he had seen—the confidential taximan with his gaping throat, the man crushed under the motorbus, the body falling into his arms from the cabinet, the dying convulsions of his ex-batman, with the knife in his lung. And all this had happened in a space of time less than he usually allowed himself for a week-end in the country. And what was going to happen next? Was it any good thinking about that, with his arms and legs hurting so abominably? Orthodoxy required that he should be

cut loose by the lovely lady of the piece, whose first task would be to rub his aching limbs tenderly. That was not a very likely event, for Irma was in the power of these fiends, and she did not even know who he was. And now he could not even talk to Granby, because of the filthy gag they had thrust into his mouth. But he could not in any case have talked to Granby, even if he had been free. For Granby was no longer there. Levinson had come for him a short while ago and taken him back to the great hall.

What were they doing in there? Red Rupert had hinted unpleasantly of things in store. But Merrill wasn't going to think about that—not yet, at any rate.

What was that? Some one was opening the door. Merrill turned as well as he could. Thank God. There was Granby again, bound as before and followed by that little brute, Levinson. So Granby was still alive. That, at any rate, was something. They were bringing him back.

But of course, they were bringing him back. What else could they do? Even Red Rupert and that terrible doctor couldn't kill a man deliberately, in cold blood. Such things were impossible.

There was a smothered gasp of pain. Levinson was laughing. At least, he supposed that wheezy cackling was a laugh. And Granby was sitting now in the wooden chair to which he had been bound, with Levinson stooping over him and adjusting the cords afresh.

Levinson left the room and closed the door behind him. For a moment there was silence and then Granby's voice:

"Are you awake, young fellow?"

Merril started and a twinge of pain shot through his wrists and ankles.

"Yes," he began to say, forgetting the orange handkerchief that gagged him and prevented him from uttering a sound.

"If you're awake," came Granby's voice again, "tap on the floor."

Merril lifted his leg and tapped as he was bidden.

"That's better," said Granby. "Now listen to me here. I expect you're feeling a trifle sore against your Uncle Granby. I got you into this. I apologize here and now. I have just been having a little talk with Rupert Ahrens, and the upshot of it is that we are to perish like birds upon a tree, as he phrases it. I knew my number was up, but I was hoping he would overlook your indiscretions. But not a bit of it. And that means we've got to do something about it, and pretty quick. Can you see the door from where you are? Tap once for 'yes.'"

Merril tapped.

"Is it shut?"

Merril tapped again.

"Good," said Granby, "because I'm going to make a bit of noise."

For a considerable time, however, the noise did not amount to very much. All Merrill could hear was Granby straining and gasping. At last, however,

there came a final heave and a murmur of triumph.

"That's done it," said Granby, "I've got my legs free. Soly isn't much of a hand with a rope. Not like the sailor-man. And now, my lad, watch out."

Granby had got to his feet and was shuffling cautiously across the room. He moved round it until he came to the door, which he opened by turning the handle with his teeth. Then he disappeared slowly into the corridor.

"What on earth is he doing?" Merrill wondered. Was he going back into the great hall? But, no, that was absurd. Merrill listened intently. Granby it seemed, was opening another door. Then Merrill heard another sound. It was Granby's voice speaking:

"Are you there, Mrs. Murdoch?" it said.

There was a startled cry from the corridor.

"Hush," came the voice of Granby again. "Don't make a noise, but come along to the kitchen, quick. It's the black man again, Mrs. Murdoch. And we'll get him this time, if you'll come along."

Merril strained his ears but apparently Granby had shut the door upon his further conversation with the old woman. Merrill heard her voice indistinctly through the wall, and Granby murmuring in reply. Then there came a further shuffling.

It was now less dark in the kitchen. A ray of moon-light was filtering through the window, and Merrill could see the outlines of the door which stood ajar. It was pushed wider open, and Granby returned.

"It's all right," he whispered. "Mrs. Murdoch is coming to help us with the blackamoor."

"Now, then," came a wheezy voice suddenly from the door, "what's all this about?"

Dimly on the threshold Merrill descried the grotesque figure of the old cook, dressed as he had seen her a short time before, with a man's jacket over her night-dress.

"Shut the door, please, Mrs. Murdoch," said Granby in a low voice, "or he'll be giving us the slip."

Mrs. Murdoch did as she was bid.

"Now, Mrs. Murdoch," continued Granby, "there's no time to lose. That black fellow was here a moment ago and he tied us both up, as you see. The first thing to do is to cut us loose, and then we've got him. Can you find a knife? You can't manage this business alone."

"That's a fact," said Mrs. Murdoch, her voice beginning to rise. "He allus slips through my fingers, 'e does, active as 'e is."

"Hush," said Granby. "Don't wake the doctor. We're going to do this on our own. I know how to deal with these black fellows. Just let me get at him, that's all."

"That's the way to talk," said Mrs. Murdoch. "It's a pleasure to 'ear you, sir. Not like the doctor, who won't never help me at all and often looks as though I was fancying things."

She was fumbling, as she spoke, in the drawer of the kitchen table from which she produced a large

bread knife. With this she set to work at once on Granby's wrists, and, after what seemed to Merrill an interminable time, he saw Granby stretching his arms.

"Thank God," said Granby.

He took the knife from the old woman.

"I will cut loose my friend," he said.

Mrs. Murdoch stood beside Granby in the shadow, peering round the room for the blackamoor.

"Where is he?" she whispered hoarsely.

"He's hiding again," said Granby. "But it won't be for long. He'll come back in a minute, thinking we're still tied up. And then it will be *his* turn for the rope."

"It's not in nature," said Mrs. Murdoch, "the way 'e comes and goes. I locks the back door and sleeps with the key," she continued, displaying the key as she spoke. "But it makes no difference. Pops up like a genius, 'e does, as I've told you before."

"He won't do any more popping after to-night," said Granby cheerfully. "We shall probably find him in the coal hole. Just unlock the door, will you. Then we can do some popping on our own account."

Granby, as he spoke, was busy cutting Merrill loose. Already he had removed the gag.

The sound of a large key turning in the lock of the kitchen door was as music in their ears.

"In the coal hole, to be sure," said Mrs. Murdoch. "And being black, you wouldn't notice him."

"What are we going to do, Colonel?" said Merrill sharply.

"You're going to clear out and leave it to me, my lad," said Granby. "Go straight to the police and I will watch things here until you come."

"But there's Irma," Merrill began.

"Don't argue. Go up to the crossroads where I stopped the car this evening. Break into the A.A. telephone box and get through to Kirbymoorside. The police, as I said, are standing by. Tell them to surround the house and instruct the sergeant from me to blow his whistle as soon as they are in position. Is that clear?"

Merril hesitated an instant and then moved towards the door. At that moment, however, Mrs. Murdoch, who had stood aside and was looking out of the window, suddenly cried out.

"Look," she said, "there he is—the thievin' savage. Just outside, by the window."

"Good Lord," said Merrill, clutching Granby by the arm, "there *is* a man out there."

He pointed towards the window, where, true enough, the head and shoulders of a man, his face gleaming black in the moonlight, could be seen against the windowpane.

Dmitri, lying in the road under the car that had brought Red Rupert from York, paused to remove a large flake of rust from his left eye. This was the end of the worst day he had ever spent in his life—worse even than the day on which he had landed with nothing but his clothes at the Golden Horn, from the deck of one of General Wrangel's few sur-

viving steamers. For Dupin was making the most of his new assistant, having during the last half-hour mainly confined himself to issuing instructions from the running board of the car, while Dmitri groveled beneath it.

Dmitri said nothing to his companion, but continued to chip at a refractory nut with the spanner. Life was bitter. There was no reason or justice in the world. All his services were forgotten. He had got Irma away from Stolin. He had been prepared to marry her and make things easy for them all—only to find that, because he objected to the cold-blooded murder of his future wife, they were prepared not only to drop him altogether, to discard him like a used glove or old boot, but to shut his mouth forever. Well, of course, he couldn't stand out against a thing like that. No one could be expected to face death for the sake of a mere girl. So he had pretended to agree. He would marry the girl and then—well, they shouldn't touch a hair of her head, not if he could possibly help it.

But that was Dupin speaking.

"Partner," Dupin was saying, "I am, as the English say, fed full with this car, and I will for a little moment leave it to you. You will repair it immediately and come to the house when it is finished. Understand?"

"You may go to the devil," said Dmitri, and a moment later he heard the retreating footsteps of Dupin.

Thank heaven for that. He was now, at any rate,

alone. And he was thirsty. He had never in his life needed a drink so badly.

He crawled cautiously from beneath the car and looked about him. The house, a hundred yards away, was livid in the moonlight. And there was Dupin moving off towards the Gothic window.

Dmitri moved to the other side of the car, keeping it between himself and Dupin. He saw his reflection in the driving mirror screwed to the wind screen as he passed, and stepped back with an exclamation of disgust. His face was as black as a sweep's, with the oil and dirt from the bottom of the engine.

He sat down on the running board for a moment and wiped his brow. Soon, however, he got up again, opened the door of the car and began feeling in the pockets. It was just possible that there might be a flask or something. Yes, by George. Not a flask exactly, but a small bottle of whisky—Haig and Haig, in fact, one of those squashy bottles with a patent cap.

He removed the cap and took a long pull. That was better, decidedly better. It was poor weak stuff, this English whisky, not, of course, to be compared with the vodka of his native land. But it was better than nothing.

He sat down again on the running board and put the bottle down beside him. For a while he sat motionless, his head in his hands, except that every now and again he took another pull at the whisky.

That was the stuff. It put new life into one. Was

the position after all so desperate as it had seemed, a moment ago? That fellow Dupin had left him contemptuously to his own devices. He was to repair the car immediately. He was, it seemed, henceforth to do only the dirty work for these brutes, while they used their magnificent brains and gave him his orders. They were simply going to make use of him. And there was worse behind. For what would they do to Irma? He would marry Irma, and then one day she would die—his little wife who loved him so dearly. For, of course, she would love him when she came to know him better. He was not a bad fellow at bottom. Quite a likable chap in his way, and women had loved him in the past. But those terrible men were merciless. They had no love in their hearts. And it was love that made the world go round.

What was he to do? If Irma could see him now and realize how sorry he was for her and how kind he meant to be to her when they were married, she would come away with him at once. He ought to have seen her before, but the doctor had always kept her so carefully to himself. He knew the reason now. The doctor had feared to lose his hold upon the girl. . . . And the way they had treated her—showing her that man in the cabinet. He ought never to have allowed them to do a thing like that. But it had restored her memory and now she was normal again and knew she was Irma Brezhoff. It would all be plain sailing now, if only he could get her away and secure those papers.

If only he could get her away! There were two cars—the one on which he had been working and the doctor's car, which was minus a magneto. The car on which he had been working baffled him. Heaven only knew what was wrong with it. It wasn't the carburetor and it wasn't the supply of petrol from the tank, and it wasn't the magneto.

It wasn't the magneto! Dmitri's eyes suddenly shone unseen in the darkness. Wonderful how the brain worked in an emergency. They had left him alone to think. They despised his intelligence and didn't realize that, once he began to think, he could get the better of them all. The process had started and in ten minutes he would have a live car at his disposal and they would have nothing—nothing but their flat feet and Jenkins' bicycle.

He opened the bonnet of the car and, picking up Dupin's electric torch, which the Frenchman had left behind, propped it up on the top of the cylinders so that the light shone down upon his work. Lucky he was so handy with the spanner. He had always liked tinkering with cars and no one could be quicker than he was with the nuts and screws. In seven minutes he had removed the thing he wanted. He held it in his hand a moment and chuckled softly.

"No," he said to himself, "it wasn't the magneto. . . . It is a perfectly good magneto . . . as pretty a magneto as ever I did see. . . . And now it's going to drive the doctor's perfectly good car."

He wrapped the tools he had been using in a

canvas holder and stuffed them into the side pocket of his coat. Then he shut the bonnet of the car, screwed it down and moved off circuitously towards the house, carrying the magneto in his hand.

He went carefully now, skirting the house, till he got to the stables. The garage door was ajar, and there was the doctor's car. He lifted the bonnet and set to work. And as he worked he went on thinking . . . thinking brilliantly. He was going to leave Sham Castle, but he would not leave it by himself. That would be a poor climax to the story. He would leave the place with Irma Brezhoff. And then where would Rupert and the doctor be? In the soup, as the English said. First he would fix the magneto. Then he would scale the wall of the house as Red Rupert had done, and get on to that absurd battle-mented affair that ran round the first floor. He would tap at Irma's window and she would let him into her room. Then he would tell her the whole story. . . . Well, not quite the whole of it, but enough to convince her that he was her only possible refuge against the doctor, Red Rupert and the rest. Then she would fly with him romantically through the night. . . . He would take her to a little place he knew, where the refugees from Russia met together, just off Tottenham Court Road. There she would be safe until he could claim her papers and arrange for the wedding. For, of course, by that time she would know that he was her savior and friend and he would be able to take her in the melting mood . . . and they would be rich beyond

all dreaming . . . and he would be faithful to her, on the whole, and very kind.

It would be quite easy, of course, to recover those papers from the post. He would return for them to Sham Castle, if necessary. For by that time Red Rupert and the rest would have made themselves scarce. They would bolt immediately, on finding that he had gone off with Irma.

At last. The car was ready now.

He gave a last look round to see that everything was in order and stole quietly from the garage, picking his way along the grass which bordered the path leading to the house. He had only one window to pass before he would reach the thick ivy which clung round the pipes that led to the battlements.

That, of course, was the kitchen window, where Merrill and Granby were tied up. Nobody was moving there. Those poor devils were still sitting in the dark, gagged and bound, awaiting the pleasure of Red Rupert.

He was sorry for Granby and Merrill. They deserved a better fate. Granby was a stout fellow and Merrill was rather a nice lad. But it did not do to be sentimental. He would set them free if he could, but that would be rather too much of a risk. That fellow Granby was a dangerous customer. Not at all the sort of chap to have loose about the place.

He was passing the window now.

Good heavens, what was that? Something was moving in the shadow, behind the pane. Could Granby

have broken loose? There it was again, an arm that waved and gesticulated.

Dmitri stood still for a moment. This would never do. He must know, at least, what was happening. He crept to the window and looked into the room. And now he breathed again. For it was only Mrs. Murdoch.

That was all very well, but Mrs. Murdoch on the prowl was just as dangerous as anybody else. There was no knowing what she might not do. Suppose, for instance, she took it into her head to cut loose Granby and Merrill, who must still be there?

Should he or should he not ignore this unexpected complication? Better, perhaps, to ignore it.

But now it was too late. The old woman had seen him. She had started back from the window and she stood in the middle of the room, gibbering as usual. He must act at once, or she would be running into the hall and giving the alarm.

He moved swiftly to the back door. It ought to be locked, of course, but the luck had turned at last, and the handle turned sweetly in his hand and in another moment he was inside.

For the moment he could see nothing but a patch of moonlight on the floor, and an angle of the kitchen table. He looked quickly for the old woman, but she was no longer in the middle of the room. In the far corner, however, in the further side of the patch of light, somebody was moving.

His hand, brushing the wall, came into contact with something cold and long. He grasped it mechan-

ically. It was the handle of a saucepan. The moonlight gleamed for a moment on the burnished copper. What was that moving in the shadow? He unhooked the saucepan from the wall and, clutching it firmly in his right hand, gazed in the direction of the sound. He could see better now. Thank God. It was only Mrs. Murdoch again. He must speak to her at once.

"Mrs. Murdoch," he began in a low tone, which seemed to him startlingly loud in the eerie kitchen, full of shadows.

There came a gasp from the old woman in front of him, and Dmitri realized in sudden panic that she was talking not to him but to some one behind her.

"Lay hold of 'im, sir. You can catch 'im if you're quick," she was saying.

Dmitri advanced with the saucepan uplifted. He was in for it now. Who would he find in the shadow? He was aware of a figure that had been standing behind Mrs. Murdoch and that now sprang forward. Dmitri aimed a blow at the unknown with the saucepan but the blow was not delivered. There came a thud under his right ear and as he staggered back, he discovered a man whom he could not distinguish clearly, with his arm drawn back for another blow. Dmitri lashed out again with the saucepan, and as he did so, he recognized his antagonist.

It was young Merrill. So Mrs. Murdoch had cut those fellows loose.

The heavy copper saucepan caught Merrill full

upon the forehead, and the smitten man went down as though he had been pole-axed. Dmitri, glowing with a joyous sense of accomplishment, turned at once to deal with Mrs. Murdoch. As he did so, however, two thin arms shot out from beside him and two sinuous hands gripped him by the throat.

Dmitri found himself looking into a pair of glittering eyes.

The moonlight and shadows wavered and became all equally gray.

Dmitri outside in the garden had been sorry for Colonel Granby. He would never be sorry again . . . never be sorry again.

CHAPTER XX

THE ARRIVAL OF THE POSTMAN

Merril stirred uneasily. Somebody was moaning . . . moaning in his sleep. But that must be himself, for his head was aching most infernally.

They had stopped pulling at him now, but it was cold . . . cold. Why had they taken away the bed-clothes? And who was that old woman, whispering and waving her arms? Some one was talking to her now. "Don't make such a noise," said a voice from the shadows, but the old woman was muttering still. "No one ever comes when I call," she was saying, "and he pops up like a genius, 'e does!" And there, before his eyes, was a huge face, black as coal, with staring eyes. But it had a red beard and red lips that smiled, and the nose, too, was very long, like an elephant's trunk, and the head was loose on the shoulders, and the whole body was falling . . . falling forward out of the cabinet. . . . There it went and now it was sliding down his waistcoat, and the thin arms clasped him round the waist, and a voice, cracked and expressionless, was calling him friend.

Merril's head fell forward, and his mind went drifting down a trackless labyrinth of unconsciousness.

He woke, stiff and aching, with a bad taste in his mouth. He tried to move, but that was impossible, for he was sitting on a hard chair and he was bound. There was no feeling in his arms and legs. It was day, and the sun was shining through the kitchen window. How did he come to be still tied up to the chair? For Granby had cut him free, and they had been going to escape. But then, of course, the black man had come into the kitchen, and the black man had hit him on the head with something hard and round. And after that he had remembered nothing.

But here he was, tied up again. And where was Granby? Merril turned his head painfully. And there, well enough, was Granby, tied up like himself, in a chair with his face to the wall.

What was going to happen next? Well, let it end, and let it end as soon as possible. He could not bear much more of this. What a little thing sufficed to take the stuffing out of a man. Just a few hours tied up in a chair—nothing further was needed. He would barter his soul now for a drink and a bed to lie on.

Then, suddenly, came the thought of Irma. She also was in this house. What would they do to her? He twisted desperately, but he could not loosen his bonds. He could do nothing—except talk to Granby. No, he couldn't talk to Granby. He was forgetting the gag.

It was then that he heard the door open.

He turned his head as Soly Levinson entered the

kitchen. Soly was even less prepossessing than usual, for he had a night's stubble on his chin and his collar was soiled and dirty. He carried a knife in his hand, and for a moment he stood looking at Merrill with an evil grin on his face. But he turned away from Merrill to the silent figure in the other chair. He stood over the bound form, and then, leaning forward prodded it gently with his knife between the shoulder blades.

The man in the chair bounded as though he had been stung. Soly laughed, but suddenly his laughter ceased, as the man in the chair twisted round and regarded him.

Merril stared at the pair of them in amazement. For the man in the chair was not Granby at all, but a man with wide eyes and a face as black as your hat. And Soly, taken aback, was gazing helplessly at the stranger.

Suddenly, however, Soly bent forward.

"Well, I'm damned," he said, "if it isn't Dmitri!"

In a flash he had torn the gag savagely from the man's mouth.

"Now, then," he demanded, his voice shaking with panic, "what the hell are you doing here and where's Granby?"

Dmitri strained at the cords binding him to the chair and Soly began to cut him free.

"Where is Granby?" he repeated harshly. "Didn't you hear what I said to you?"

"Curse him," stammered Dmitri. "I don't know

where he is. He pretty nearly strangled me last night."

"You needn't start feeling your blasted neck," said Soly, as he cut the last rope from the chair. "It's likely to be a lot worse if we're caught and the hangman gets busy. How did Cranby get loose?"

"I didn't let him loose," said Dmitri. "He was loose when I arrived. It must have been Mrs. Murdoch."

Levinson turned to Merrill and snatched the gag from his mouth.

"Now, then," he said. "You'd better tell me quick. What's been happening here, and where is the Colonel?"

Where *was* Granby? Merrill was asking himself the same question. Granby must have tied up Dmitri in the chair and not only Dmitri but himself. Why had he done that? Had he got away? And had he got away with Irma? The whole thing was inexplicable, and there was Soly waiting for an answer.

"I haven't the least idea where Granby is," he said.

"See here," said Soly, turning suddenly on Dmitri. "You'd better come along at once with me and explain things to the boss. He'll talk to you better than I can."

He caught hold of Dmitri as he spoke and sent him staggering towards the door.

The great hall was thick with tobacco smoke. The electric lights were still burning, but through the curtains drawn carelessly across the window fell

a shaft of clean sunlight, cleaving the blue haze. Red Rupert was sitting with the doctor. Short-house still wore his fantastic dressing gown of green and gold. A small table was between them, and, as Soly entered, shuffling his feet as usual, the voice of Red Rupert broke the silence.

"Rubiconed again, Doctor. You're not in luck, to-night."

The two men were playing piquet, and were apparently in the best of humor.

"You left me no choice," said the doctor pleasantly.

He pulled out his watch as he spoke.

"Still thinking of the postman?" said Red Rupert. "You should keep your mind on the game, Doctor."

"He should be here in twenty minutes," said Short-house.

"Hullo, Soly," said Red Rupert, catching sight of his henchman. "What news from the death house? Good morning, Dmitri. Have you used Pear's soap? Apparently not."

He giggled affably, but Soly was not amused.

"Boss," he said, lisping more thickly than usual.

"The news is bad. Granby has escaped. . . ."

"What!" said Red Rupert.

He started to his feet. The card table went spinning to the floor and the cards were scattered in bright heaps about the carpet.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

Soly caught Dmitri by the arm.

"Now, then, you," he said. "Perhaps you'll explain to the boss."

Red Rupert turned on Dmitri swiftly.

"So this is your doing, is it?" he said.

He sprang lightly forward and seized Dmitri by the lapel of his coat. Dmitri's knees shook beneath him, and big man though he was, he offered no resistance. Red Rupert shook him like a terrier with a rat, and then, thrusting him backwards, he let go so that Dmitri staggered and almost fell.

"Steady," came the voice of the doctor.

"Quite right," said Red Rupert suddenly bland again. "No use hanging the stableboy."

He turned back to Dmitri.

"Now, Mr. Sterling. When did this happen?"

"I was working on the car till long past midnight. Then I went to the kitchen. Granby was loose. He nearly strangled me, and he must have tied me up when I was unconscious."

"And the car—is it ready?"

"The Morris is ready," said Dmitri. "I changed the magnetos."

Red Rupert lifted an elegant boot and dug it into the ribs of Dupin, who was sleeping in an arm-chair beside the table. Dupin sprang to his feet with an oath.

"Dupin," said Red Rupert briefly, "the doctor's car is in working order. Bring it round to the side door, near the kitchen. Get the spare pistols and ammunition from our own car and bring them to me here."

"Very good, *chef*," said Dupin.

He went off through the window, and Red Rupert turned back to Dmitri.

"You say you were overpowered and tied up?"

"Yes."

"What were you doing in the kitchen?"

"I was passing the window and I saw that Mrs. Murdoch was there. I went in and was attacked by the prisoners who had got loose."

"Then Merrill, too, has escaped?"

"No, he hasn't. I knocked him out before I was caught by the Colonel, and when I came to my senses this morning, there he was, tied up again with me."

"That's right, boss," put in Soly. "He's still in the kitchen, tied up as we left him last night."

Red Rupert turned to Shorthouse.

"Well, Doctor," he said, "what do you make of that?"

"It's certainly odd," said Shorthouse. "Granby must have realized he couldn't get away with his friend. But did he get away with Irma?"

"Soly," said Red Rupert, "go upstairs and see if the girl is in her room. Don't disturb her, if she is there, but come back and report to me at once."

"Very good, boss," said Soly.

Red Rupert turned to Dmitri.

"You'd better go upstairs and wash your face," he suggested. "You can't travel like that."

Dmitri followed Soly upstairs, while Red Rupert

crossed the room and, drawing the curtains, let a flood of sunlight into the frowsy hall.

"Doctor," he said, "you've explained why Granby left the house without his friend. But you have missed the real point of interest. Why did he tie him up?"

"It is certainly odd," repeated Shorthouse.

"Come, Doctor," Red Rupert urged, "a little imagination and I think the explanation will occur to you. Yesterday evening we left two people tied up in the kitchen. Colonel Granby escapes, but he also leaves two people tied up in the kitchen. What is the inference?"

"The inference," said the doctor, "is that he does not wish us to perceive that our arrangements have miscarried."

"Naturally. We look into the kitchen and, perceiving that our prisoners are still there, we retire to wait for the postman. In other words, Colonel Granby does not wish us to be in any way alarmed. The birds, as he would say, are in the net."

The doctor again consulted his watch.

"Quarter to eight," he observed. "In another quarter of an hour we should be able to get away."

"You can rely on that postman of yours?"

"To the minute."

"Then we should be getting ready to start, and we must leave things shipshape, as our friend Dupin would say. Have you any ideas on the subject?"

The doctor looked significantly at Red Rupert.

"You will remember, Ahrens," he said, "that

when you proposed at two o'clock this morning a certain ceremony . . ."

"An interment, I think?"

"Exactly. I suggested that a Roman funeral might be more appropriate."

Red Rupert looked critically about him.

"It will burn, I suppose."

"Like tinder. And my housekeeper, Mrs. Murdoch, is notoriously careless. It is a bright summer morning. The house is isolated and not easily visible. It is mostly built of wood and plaster, and we have a good supply of petrol. Certain remains may be found, but I am known to be entertaining several patients."

Red Rupert nodded.

"Very well," he said. "That disposes of Jenkins and Stolin."

"But Merrill remains," said the doctor.

"Exactly," said Red Rupert. "*Merril remains.*"

Shorthouse seemed about to speak, but at that moment Soly appeared at the head of the stairs.

"Well?" said Red Rupert sharply.

"It's all right, boss," Levinson announced. "The girl is in her room and sleeping soundly."

"That settles it," said Red Rupert. "We will wait for the postman. Go back to Miss Brezhoff, Soly, wake her up and tell her to put on some clothes. She must be ready to start in five minutes. Don't frighten her, but there must be no delay."

Soly nodded and began to climb the stairs just as Dupin entered through the Gothic window.

"Well, Dupin, is the car all right?"

"Quite all right, *chef*."

"Excellent."

"Anything else, *chef*?"

"Yes, Dupin. This is one of your busy mornings. You will now get two tins of petrol from the garage and then you will help Dmitri to carry Jenkins and Stolin . . . upstairs, I think, eh, Doctor?"

"Yes," said Shorthouse; "we'll put them in the bedrooms. If we drench the bedclothes they'll be burnt to a cinder almost before the house is fairly alight."

"And Merril?"

"Is that necessary?" said the doctor.

"He's a second witness against us—the only witness, apart from Granby. Granby, apart from Merril, has no corroboration at all—not even a body to show for his pains. Come, Doctor, don't be squeamish. You can chloroform the patient beforehand if you like."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said. "It's pretty desperate, in any case. We are marked men, and it's going to be very difficult to produce Irma to the authorities and to prove her identity."

"One thing at a time," said Red Rupert grimly. "We've got the girl and in a moment we shall have her papers. Her fortune, you tell me, is invested abroad."

"Mostly in Spain and in the Free City of Danzig."

"You can leave that part of the business to me, Doctor. I've pulled hotter chestnuts than this from the fire. And if the worst comes to the worst the heiress of the Brezhoffs will be worth a tidy ransom to her friends. This morning we shall retire to a small farmhouse of mine, not very far from here, and there we shall wait until I can get hold of my yacht. Dupin is in command of her, and she is lying at Tilbury. It won't take us more than three or four days to get her from there. And once aboard the lugger . . ."

The doctor stared with reluctant admiration at his partner. The man was dynamic. He had dropped his affectations and stood quietly by the window, his red lips pressed firmly together, his colorless eyes glittering with a strange eagerness.

Suddenly he gripped the doctor by the arm.

"Look," he said, and at the same time he pointed with his free hand.

Over the edge of the moor a solitary figure had appeared and was coming towards them. It wore a soiled blue uniform and carried a leather bag across the shoulder.

"Bless him," said Red Rupert, with a little giggle of excitement. "I'm not partial as a rule to persons in uniform, but in this case I make an exception."

The man on the moor appeared to be in no particular hurry. He trudged along indifferently, as though bored with his monotonous round. He was about two hundred yards away, when he paused to

observe the sudden flight of a grouse disturbed by his leisurely passage.

"He little suspects the excitement he is causing us," said Red Rupert.

The two men at the window watched the man outside, who was showing so unseasonable an interest in game birds.

"Ah, that's better," murmured Red Rupert, as the postman resumed his slow progress to the house and reached the garden gate.

They looked round simultaneously from the window as Soly appeared on the staircase.

"Is Miss Brezhoff ready?" asked Red Rupert shortly.

"She will be down in a minute, boss. She is asking to see the doctor."

"All right, Soly. The doctor will see her presently. For the moment he prefers to remain with me."

"Anything the matter, boss?"

"On the contrary, Soly. Our deliverance is in sight. Doctor, this is your cue."

It was the knocker on the front door to which Red Rupert alluded, for at that moment a vigorous rat-tat shook the frail walls of Sham Castle.

The doctor crossed to the window and called sharply to the man outside. A shuffling step was heard on the terrace and there at last stood the postman, just outside the Gothic window, fumbling in his bag—an oldish man with long wisps of gray hair sticking from beneath his ill-fitting cap.

The doctor held out his hand impatiently for the buff-colored envelope which the postman had taken from his bag.

"Thou'lt have to sign for it, sir," said the postman. "It's registered," producing from his jacket pocket a small book for the purpose.

Shorthouse took the book, and crossing the room, set it down on the table.

"Come in, postman," he said. "Have you got a pencil?"

"Here it be, sir," said the postman, advancing to the table.

"Where do I sign?" asked the doctor.

The postman took the book and ran a dirty finger down the column.

"There," said the postman.

Shorthouse pressed the book back with his left hand, for it was rather stiff, and began to sign his name with the right.

"Thank you, Doctor," said the postman quietly. "That makes it easier."

Red Rupert started forward. There was a click, a sharp cry from the doctor, and an instant later Red Rupert was looking into the barrel of an automatic. On the doctor's wrists a pair of handcuffs was gleaming.

"Put 'em up, Ahrens, and you too, Levinson," said the postman, and at the same moment he put his head back and whistled shrilly through his teeth.

There was a sound outside. A car swung into view over the edge of the moor and the garden of

Sham Castle swarmed suddenly with men in the uniform of the North Riding Constabulary. Three of them entered by the window and at a signal from the postman took effective charge of Red Rupert and Soly Levinson.

"Well, Ahrens," came the voice of Granby, plucking off his cap and the gray wig attached to it, "I was hoping that you would wait for your correspondence, or rather that of the late Mr. Jenkins."

"A brilliant impersonation, if I may say so," said Red Rupert, as a burly sergeant clipped the bracelets on his wrists.

But Granby turned from him quickly.

"Now, Doctor," he said sharply. "What have you done with Merrill?"

But the doctor was unable to speak. His face was working uncontrollably and he suddenly collapsed into a chair by the table, and his head fell forward into his manacled hands.

"You need be under no apprehension about your friend," volunteered Red Rupert. "He is still where you left him, tied up in the kitchen, wondering, I daresay, why his partner so basely deserted him."

Granby turned to the officer beside him.

"Sergeant," he began.

But at that moment there was a sound from upstairs, a woman's voice speaking urgently in a foreign tongue. Then almost at once there came a sharp cry of distress.

In a moment Granby was at the foot of the stairs. He went up them at a run and disappeared into

the corridor. There was a murmur of voices and the next instant Dmitri appeared in the gallery and the voice of Granby came clearly down to the men in the room below.

"That was unwise of you, Mr. Sterling. I had almost forgotten your existence."

Granby looked over the gallery.

"Sergeant," he said, "here's some one else for you."

"Is this the lot, Colonel?" demanded the sergeant, as Dmitri was taken to join his friends below.

As though in answer to the sergeant's question, a man appeared at the Gothic window. He was carrying two tins of petrol. Blinded by the sunlight, he advanced several paces into the room. Suddenly he stopped. The tins fell to the floor, and in a flash Dupin was struggling violently in the sergeant's grasp.

"Mind your thumbs," called Granby from the gallery.

"All right, Colonel," said the sergeant, breathing heavily. "I've got him. But by gum, he's a twister. Any more of 'em, sir?"

"No, that's the lot. Take them to the car outside and wait for me there. And please keep out of the kitchen. I sha'n't be long. But for the moment I am gravely preoccupied with a young lady."

Merril, left alone in the kitchen, strained his ears. What was happening in the great hall? Soly had shut the door behind Dmitri and himself and beyond

an occasional murmur of voices he could distinguish nothing. Through the kitchen window he saw Dupin pass to the garage.

There was one sound only that broke the uneasy silence in which he brooded—the double knock of a postman.

The papers had arrived. But Irma, perhaps, had departed and was somewhere safe with Granby. He would soon know. If Irma were still in the house, they would be taking her away, now that they had discovered Granby's escape and now that the papers had reached them.

What was happening in the great hall? Why did no one come to . . . to deal with him? For obviously they *would* deal with him before leaving Sham Castle. He knew too much.

He almost hoped now that they would come quickly. He was so tired that he could have slept in his bonds if they had been a little less uncomfortable. Sleep . . . sleep . . . like the man in that play of Bernard Shaw he had once seen, who had been trying to escape from his enemies and who yet had fallen asleep standing up and had begun to walk about in a dream, looking for danger. Danger . . . danger . . . where's danger . . . But he must not sleep again, or he would be having another of those awful nightmares, in which Stolin and Goldenberg and Jenkins and Red Rupert and Soly Levinson all got mixed up.

Danger . . . danger . . . where's danger?

Merril started in his chair. That must have been

a sound in the passage outside. It had come at last. This was the end. The door of the kitchen opened.

Merril stared at the apparition on the threshold. He must have fallen asleep and was dreaming again, and this dream was even more preposterous and tormenting than the others. For there, in the doorway, Irma was standing. She was dressed for a journey and looking towards him with wide, compassionate eyes. And she seemed to remember who he was, for she came forward and called him by his name. And now she had taken a knife from the kitchen table and was cutting him free.

That, of course, was how things happened in romances. His poor brain had gone completely. Even his dreams were now too silly for words.

But Irma was speaking.

"Don't you understand, Dick," she was saying. "It's all right now. Colonel Granby is here with the police. And he has explained everything. There, my poor Dick, you are free now. Can you move your arms?"

He tried, in his sleep, of course, to move his arms. By Jove, that was a real pain that stabbed his muscles, and his eyes were certainly wide open, and that was Irma standing beside him with the knife.

Could he move his arms? He tried again, and this time he discovered that Irma was not a dream. It hurt him damnably to hold her so fast, but let it hurt. It might go on hurting to all eternity.

"You did not remember me, Irma," he said some minutes later.

They stood together by the kitchen window. Outside they could see Granby and the sergeant. They were talking to Mrs. Murdoch, who had apparently decided to give the doctor a month's notice, for beside her was a policeman who carried a tin trunk, and Mrs. Murdoch herself had on a black cape and a bonnet adorned with jet bugles that flashed and twinkled in the morning light.

"I remember everything now," said Irma slowly, "though there are some things I don't want to remember."

"Of course," said Merrill.

There was silence a moment. Outside Mrs. Murdoch was talking to Granby, who was apparently making rapid progress with the old lady, for she had ceased to look indignant and was smiling amiably upon the sergeant.

"You remember Monte Carlo?" said Merrill in a low voice.

"That night in the garden of the hotel," he went on. "You don't want to forget that, do you? Say you don't, Irma."

"No," she replied, "I remember that."

"And do you remember what I said?"

"Perhaps."

"May I say it again?"

"This is England," she said. "They say that in your country speech is free."

Merril caught her in his arms.

"Irma, darling," he said, "I love you more than I can ever say."

But suddenly he withdrew. On his face was an expression of dismay.

"I was forgetting," he said grimly. "You are very rich."

She looked at him a moment in consternation. Was he going to be stupid about her money?

Swiftly, however, he drew her back into his arms.

"But fortunately, so am I," he added quickly, with a smile.

There was a light step in the passage. Granby stood in the doorway. Merrill, looking up, perceived him.

Granby shook his head reprovingly.

"Pretty sinister," he murmured.

THE END

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